

The Five-Day War in the Caucasus

An Inquiry Into the Rationality of Georgia's Attack on South Ossetia

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January 2009

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Anders Kjølberg, for useful comments, encouragement and his flexibility regarding the time and place of our discussions.

I would also like to thank Helge Blakkisrud at NUPI for taking the time to discuss my thesis subject at the initial stage of my work.

My gratitude towards my friend Magnus Thue is infinite. His critical remarks, guidance and especially his encouragements have made the work with this thesis easier.

My dear Cezar Zavate deserves a big *mulțumesc* for his encouragements and technical support.

Finally, I would like to thank mamma and pappa for being the best parents in the world. This thesis is dedicated to them.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	2
CONTENTS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 SUBJECT AND RESEARCH QUESTION	6
1.2 THEORY AND JUSTIFICATION	8
1.3 THE FIVE-DAY WAR	9
1.4 CASE STUDIES	11
1.4.1 <i>The case study method</i>	11
1.4.2 <i>Sources</i>	13
1.4.3 <i>Validity and reliability</i>	13
1.5 SUMMARY AND ROADMAP TO THE THESIS	15
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	17
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	17
2.2 GAME THEORY	17
2.2.1 <i>Game theory literature</i>	17
2.2.2 <i>Advantages of game theory</i>	18
2.2.3 <i>Critics of game theory</i>	19
2.3 RATIONALITY	19
2.4 THE COMPONENTS OF A GAME.....	21
2.4.1 <i>Players</i>	21
2.4.2 <i>Strategies</i>	22
2.4.3 <i>Outcomes</i>	23

2.4.4	<i>Preferences/ payoffs</i>	23
2.4.5	<i>Rules of the game</i>	24
2.5	TYPOLGY OF GAMES	24
2.5.1	<i>Two-persons versus N-persons games</i>	24
2.5.2	<i>Simultaneous versus sequential games</i>	24
2.5.3	<i>One-shot versus iterated games</i>	25
2.5.4	<i>Cooperative versus non-cooperative games</i>	25
2.5.5	<i>Games with complete versus incomplete information</i>	25
2.5.6	<i>Games with perfect versus imperfect information</i>	26
2.6	THE SOLUTION TO A GAME.....	26
2.7	‘NESTED GAMES’	27
2.8	SUMMARY	28
3.	FACTUAL BACKGROUND	30
3.1	INTRODUCTION	30
3.2	THE POST-SOVIET SECURITY COMPLEX.....	30
3.3	RUSSIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY.....	32
3.4	GEORGIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY.....	34
3.4.1	<i>The security objectives of the Georgian “Foreign Policy Strategy”</i>	34
3.4.2	<i>Georgia’s long path towards NATO membership</i>	34
3.5	THE FROZEN CONFLICT IN SOUTH OSSETIA.....	36
3.5.1	<i>Frozen conflict</i>	36
3.5.2	<i>South Ossetia</i>	37
3.6	SUMMARY	39

4.	TRADITIONAL GAME THEORETICAL ANALYSIS.....	40
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	40
4.2	THE GAME OF SOUTH OSSETIA.....	40
4.2.1	<i>Players</i>	40
4.2.2	<i>Type of game</i>	43
4.2.3	<i>The players' strategies</i>	46
4.2.4	<i>The outcomes</i>	47
4.2.5	<i>The consequences of the outcomes</i>	48
4.2.6	<i>The preferences/ payoffs</i>	50
4.2.7	<i>The analysis' answer to my research question</i>	53
5.	“NESTED GAMES” ANALYSIS.....	55
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	55
5.2	GAME 1: GEORGIA – INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	57
5.2.1	<i>Did Georgia expect support from the US and NATO?</i>	57
5.2.2	<i>Did Georgia think that the attack would speed up the integration with the West?</i>	62
5.2.3	<i>Window of opportunity</i>	67
5.3	GAME 2: GEORGIA-DOMESTIC ARENA.....	68
5.4	GAME 3: RUSSIA- INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	74
5.5	GAME 4: RUSSIA – DOMESTIC ARENA	79
5.6	SUMMARY	81
6.	CONCLUSION	82
	SOURCES:	86

1. Introduction

1.1 Subject and Research Question

The subject of my thesis is the outbreak of the war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008. Although a war was expected by many between Georgia and Russia at least since the NATO summit in April 2008, it came as a shock to most people when it erupted in August last year. I was profoundly surprised by the Georgian attack on South Ossetia. Being interested in the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet area, I was aware of the tensions in the separatist enclave. However, I would never have expected such an extreme move from Georgia's side. When the war broke out in August, my research focus shifted from the frozen conflict of Transnistria in Moldova to the suddenly burning hot one in South Ossetia in Georgia. I went from wondering what sustains a frozen conflict, to wonder what would motivate someone to defreeze it by the means of warfare.

This intrigues me especially because the subsequent Russian counterattack seemed inevitable. The Russian military response led to Georgian defeat, and great losses. The greatest losses are of course those of human lives, of both soldiers and civilians, but also the economic consequences of the war are disastrous to Georgia. The fatality of the outcome made the attack seem to be an irrational act. While trying to understand the Georgian attack on South Ossetia, I became mainly interested in whether this seemingly irrational decision could be explained rationally.

The research questions for this thesis are therefore: *Was the Georgian attack on South Ossetia an irrational act? If not, what rational reasons were behind it?*

To answer these research questions, it is not sufficient to search for reasons why the attack happened. What is essential is whether Georgia had advantages of attacking

that were more important than the disadvantages of this decision. If it was against the Georgian interests to attack after weighing the benefits against the costs, the answer to why it happened should be searched for with another approach than the rational one I use here.

There is still great confusion about who really started this war. Some researchers, among them Dmitri Trenin, think that Georgia set up a strategic trap for Russia with its attack (Trenin 2008a), and that the Russian counterattack was expected and wanted in Tbilisi. Others are convinced that Georgia, by attacking, went straight into a trap Russia had set up, and that Russia wanted this as a pretext to attack Georgia. I shall not go into details about what the facts are and the right interpretation of these, given that this is not the aim of my thesis.

I shall instead be searching for motives that make the Georgian move of attacking rational. This does not mean that I will find the true motivations behind the attack. I cannot prove that the reasons I find were the ones that actually led Georgia to wage war. I am not seeking to establish a causal link in this thesis. My aim is to present hypotheses of possible rational motivations behind Georgia's decision to attack. I do not intend to come up with definite answers.

I want to study the perceived utility to Georgia of attacking South Ossetia, and see if this was of such value that an attack could be understood in a perspective where actors behave according to what is in their perceived interest. If the Georgian leadership acted in the way it thought was best to promote its perceived interests, the answer to my research question regarding the rationality of the attack will be positive.

The first research question requires a yes/no answer. In the search for this answer, I will study different arenas of interests and power games that should cast light on both Georgian and Russian interests and behaviour. At the same time, this will give an answer to the second research question. I shall explore different possible reasons

behind the Georgian attack. I think this is of great value at a time where international power relations seem to change and where Russia is taking on a larger role to the detriment of its smaller neighbours, and also to the detriment of the EU and the US.

1.2 Theory and justification

Since my study will be a quest for rationality in the Georgian behaviour, I shall use the Rational Choice literature as theoretical background. More precisely, I shall analyze my case within the framework of game theory. I will use George Tsebelis's theory of "nested games" in the continuation of traditional game theory. Both will be thoroughly explained in the next chapter. The justification for using game theory is first of all that the case I want to study is at the heart of what game theory is aimed at explaining. The approach is generally very useful in the analysis of power relations and interaction of the kind we saw in South Ossetia in August 2008. This is a relevant consideration because I use the theory as a structuring tool. It would be of little use as such if it did not fit the case.

This naturally leads over to the next justification for using game theory. This theory is indeed known for its advantageous structuring effect. With its clear prescriptions of what to look for, it sets up a first picture of strategic interaction. This structure can be further developed at a later stage. Since the war is of recent date and a lot remains to be clarified about the situation, I think a game theoretical account of the outbreak of the war can be useful as a point of departure to understand the war and its underlying factors.

There is nothing original in applying game theory to a case of conflict between states, and other students of political science have used this approach before me in their master thesis (see for example Danbolt 2005, Aaby Hirsch 2007). The scientific justification for my thesis lies in its explorative value. I seek to clarify a recent event in international relations by using one of the basic theories in political science. The

realist Hans Morgenthau said that the inquiries of political scientists often disappear into “the trivial, the formal, the methodological, the purely theoretical, the remotely historical – in short, the politically irrelevant” (Morgenthau 1966: 73). I do not think my thesis will fall into either of these categories.

The amount of academic literature on the war in August is increasing every day. To my knowledge, there has not yet been any attempt to model the war with the help of game theory. Most attempts to explain why Georgia attacked South Ossetia have been focusing largely on one or few motivational issues explaining the attack. A systematic gathering of different arguments is necessary in order to see the whole picture. Even if I will not be able to consider all arguments, I believe that my thesis can contribute to a better understanding of this moment of dramatic, international interaction. I hope that my findings in this way can be of interest to others than me.

1.3 The Five-Day War

Just before midnight on August 7 2008, Georgian forces attack Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, with rockets and artillery shells. The Russian response comes already the next day, and swiftly turns the situation around for Georgia. The intense war, soon to be named the Five-Day War, came after a series of clashes between the Georgian government’s forces and the South Ossetian separatists during the summer (BBC 2008a). The Georgian attack came only hours after the Georgian president, Mikhail Saakashvili, had asked for a ceasefire with the separatists (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2008).

On August 8, Russian soldiers enter Georgia through the Roki tunnel. This tunnel is the only road linking North Ossetia, which is a part of Russia, with South Ossetia. The local population of Ossetians flees the other way. Simultaneously, Russian airplanes are bombing Georgia proper. Georgia has at this point taken control of Tskhinvali. The president of South Ossetia, backed up by Russian observers, speaks

of 1,600 South Ossetian casualties, making the situation appear as a Georgian massacre. This is later revealed as untrue (ibid.).

On August 9, Tskhinvali is in Russian hands. The Georgian town of Gori, where Joseph Stalin was born, is a strategically important town close to the capital Tbilisi. Gori, and its military base, is bombed. Uproar spreads to the other Georgian secessionist area, Abkhazia, where Russia is also moving in. On August 10, Russia is advancing towards Gori on the ground, while continuing the bombing of the town from the air. Other targets close to Tbilisi, among them a military airport, are hit. The next day, Russia expands into Georgia proper also from Abkhazia, taking control over several Georgian towns (ibid).

After five dramatic days, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agrees on August 12 to halt the invasion following a six-point deal brokered by the French president Nicholas Sarkozy. The following days, this deal is negotiated and revised to be accepted by President Saakashvili on August 15 and President Medvedev August 16. However, hostilities continue in Georgia – Russia having its own interpretation of the agreement. The withdrawal of Russian troops is slow. On August 22, most of the Russian troops are back in the secessionist areas, only a few still remain in a buffer zone around these. Russia insists that these remaining soldiers are only “peace keepers” (ibid).

On August 26, Russia formally recognizes the independence of South Ossetia and of Abkhazia, a decision President Medvedev calls “irreversible” five days later. The reactions and criticism of this move are strong in the international community, and the diplomatic efforts continue throughout the autumn to find a solution to this crisis with large implications outside of Georgia (ibid.).

1.4 Case studies

1.4.1 The case study method

In this thesis, I have chosen to use the case study method as research design. There have been numerous attempts to define and explain what a case study really is. John Gerring (2004:342) defines a case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units”. The advantage of this definition is that it is relatively precise. However, it is a positivist definition, since Gerring focuses on generalization as the purpose of the study. Positivists strive for scientific research to be i.a. general and cumulative (Jacobsen 2005:32). This means that the object of study is not to be explained only for its own sake. It is studied in order to understand a general phenomenon of which it is an example, and for scientists to build on these findings in subsequent research. Non-positivists will generally disagree with Gerring’s definition, as they will see exploration and explanation of the case in itself as reason good enough to do a case study, without having to, or being able to, employ the findings any further.

I think that being too strict about the necessity of a generalizing value might hamper the accumulation of good political science. As Stephen Van Evera (1997:75) points out, political scientists often leave case-explaining studies to historians. This is not necessarily a good division of labour, as the historians according to Van Evera tend to give less stringent explanations than political scientists would do. Their explanations of a phenomenon will be more difficult to interpret and evaluate, since their “theoretical lenses” often are less evident (*ibid*).

Svein S. Andersen (1997:61-93) divides case studies into five main categories, according to what kind of relation they have to theory, and hence to generalization. He separates two categories whose aim is solely explanation of the actual case, namely the “theoretical” and the “theoretically exegetic” case studies. The first category is only an ideal type and impossible to conduct in reality in its strict sense,

since the scientist will always wear some kind of “analytical glasses”. By this, I mean prejudices as opinions of how things are related to each other, and as opinions of what constitute the relevant data. The other category of “theoretically exegetic” case studies is studies where theory is used to describe a case. This category is common among non-positivists since they do not find it possible to say anything beyond the specific case under study.

My case study of the rationality of the Georgian attack on South Ossetia falls into the second, non-positivistic category of “theoretically exegetic” case studies because I use game theory to describe my case. Andersen actually describes as a typical example of this category “when notions from game theory are applied to describe cases and situations”. The aim of this kind of case studies is to *use* generalizations to shed light on special cases (ibid: 68).

The three remaining categories are suitable to generalizations. They are case studies where the scientist 1) develops notions, 2) generates hypotheses, and 3) tests hypotheses. This last category is especially contested in the scientific literature, because some scholars think that hypotheses only can be tested statistically (ibid: 83). From a positivistic point of view, it is only these latter three categories that rightfully can be called scientific qualitative research, notably because of the possibilities of generalization to which they open up.

My thesis is not an attempt to evaluate the usefulness of game theory, which would have put it into one of the categories falling under Gerring’s definition. I use the game theory only in an explorative way. The findings will therefore have no bearings on whether game theory can explain the case better than other theories, or not. The case study could possibly contribute to the understanding of broader pictures, for example of Russia’s regained self-confidence and new behaviour in world politics. I again emphasize that the study has no generalizing ambitions. I find it good enough as a

justification for my research that it will shed light on a recent event of decisive importance to the international political order.

1.4.2 Sources

In my study, I shall primarily rely on secondary sources. Some data are from primary sources like official documents from the Russian and the Georgian governments and from NATO, and personal notes from lectures by i.a. President Saakashvili, but the main bulk of data stems from articles in newspapers and journals of various origins. I also use scientific articles and books. One challenge I have been aware of related to the use of data, is not to take documents describing the results of the Georgian decision to attack in various areas as proofs of what reflections and calculations president Saakashvili made at the decisive moment. Although I sometimes describe the actual implications of the war, it is always with this in mind.

Another problem is that real motives in politics are in most cases hidden. What the actors say about their motives is to a large extent just rhetoric adjusted to their future moves. What analysts are able to read from their actions is also questionable. This has been quite obvious in this case, as I throughout the work with my thesis have encountered diametrically opposite interpretations of most actions and statements related to the crisis in Georgia.

1.4.3 Validity and reliability

What should be decisive for the choice of research design and research strategies, are considerations of how to maximize the reliability and validity of the study (Haverland 2007:59). This depends of course on the research question the study sets out to answer. As always, restrictions in possibilities and resources also play a role in the choice of method.

Given my research questions, a case study based mainly on secondary sources seemed the natural way to conduct the study. If I had used another research strategy, say

conducting interviews, I do not think the validity of this thesis would have improved in proportion to the extra costs and use of resources this would have entailed. I have strived to heighten the validity and the reliability of the thesis and its conclusions by using different sources, from several countries. When analyzing an emotional situation such as war, it is important to keep in mind the context of the voice and interpret the content accordingly. When searching for relevant documents, I also spoke with specialists who made me aware of good sources with an abundance of material to my study.

The reliability, i.e. the accuracy (Hellevik 1999:471), of my thesis is quite easy to control, as I have consistently referred to my sources. It is easy to see where I refer to facts, where I interpret them according to my logic, and where I analyze them in light of game theory. This puts the reader in a position where he can easily replicate my study using his own analytical glasses and make his own interpretations. He can this way evaluate the assumptions I have made, and my conclusions.

Validity refers to the relevance of the data to my research question (Hellevik 1999:473). Regarding validity, there are mainly four aspects to consider (Christophersen 2007): The first aspect is “concept validity”, that is whether the operationalizations are sound. In this thesis, I make use of the terms from game theory, a theory recognized for its good and clear operationalizations. I therefore see this aspect as unproblematic.

The second aspect is the “validity of conclusions” and relates to whether the inferences I make based on the research are substantially interesting. I think that searching for rational motives in national leaders most important decisions is highly important, especially the seemingly irrational ones. The conclusions of my thesis will therefore be substantially interesting, as they will give the result of this endeavour.

The third aspect is the “internal validity”, concerning causal inferences based on the study. I do not make any, so this aspect will be irrelevant to my thesis. The fourth aspect of validity is “external validity”. It relates to the generalizability of the findings of the study. This last aspect of validity is also of less importance to my study, for reasons explained above.

1.5 Summary and roadmap to the thesis

In this chapter, I have made a short introduction to what my thesis is about by explaining my subject and research questions and the motivations behind them, by picturing the situation I shall study and by discussing and justifying my method, the theory and the sources I shall use in the analysis. Finally, I included a discussion of the validity and the reliability of my study.

In chapter two, I shall describe the theoretical background of my thesis, which is the traditional game theory and Tsebelis theory of ‘nested games’. I shall give a thorough explanation of the different components of game theory, and the assumptions one must make in order to use it as an analytical tool. As the theory of nested games is a continuation of game theoretical work, the account for this theory will be less extensive. I shall only use the author’s main idea as another perspective in my analysis. A more detailed description of Tsebelis’ work would hence be superfluous. The fact that this latter part of the theoretical background is significantly shorter than the first does not signify a proportional asymmetry between the two chapters of analysis where the theories are put to use.

In chapter three, I shall give a factual background to my thesis, placing my subject into the wider context of geopolitics in the Caucasian area, the foreign and security policy of Russia and of Georgia and the post-Soviet frozen conflicts.

In chapter four, I offer the first part of my analysis. This is where I analyze the game between Georgia and Russia after a traditional game theoretical recipe in the attempt to explain the Georgian move – the attack on South Ossetia – rationally. I define the game; I study the actors, their strategies and their preference structures related to the alternative outcomes. I look at the rational solution to the game and see whether this fits the situation in reality.

In chapter five, I extend the analysis of the Georgian move and its eventual rational explanation by looking at four other games that might be of relevance to the game of South Ossetia. I analyze whether interests and preferences in those new games might influence on the preferences, and thus the choice of strategy, in the main game. If they have any effect, they might contribute to the rational explanation of Georgia's attack on South Ossetia.

In chapter six, I sum up the findings of my two-folded analysis, and I answer the research questions based on my findings.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain the main features of the theoretical tool I shall use in my analysis, namely game theory. In the first section, I shall give a brief overview of game theory literature and point out the utility of, and problems related to, the use of game theory. In the next section, I shall discuss the notion of ‘rationality’. I shall do so because game theory assumes that actors are rational, and because detecting rationality in the Georgian decision to attack South Ossetia is the main purpose of my study. I shall then proceed by looking at the different components of a game, different types of games and their solutions. In the last section, I give a presentation of Tsebelis theory of ‘nested games’ as a further contribution to the game theoretical literature. This framework will be used in the second part of the quest for rationality in the Georgian behaviour.

2.2 Game theory

2.2.1 Game theory literature

In 1944, John von Neumann and Oscar Morgenstern established game theory as a theoretical strand within the rational choice tradition, with their seminal book “Theory of Games and Economic Behavior”.

A ‘game’ is shortly explained as interaction between players where the fate of one player also depends on the actions of the other players, not only his own (Binmore 1990:1). Game theory is a mathematical approach to explain or predict this strategic interaction between players.

Von Neumann and Morgenstern observed an analogy between parlour games and real-life games. They argued that if one strips off from a game situation all the irrelevant (non-strategic) details regarding what is the optimal choice to make, what remains is an abstract decision problem. The strategic basic structure here is equal in parlour and real-life games, and they can therefore be solved in the same way (ibid: 2-3).

This pioneer work has been built on, and extended, by many scholars. The most famous are probably John Nash (Nobel laureate in 1994) and Thomas Schelling (Nobel laureate in 2005). Game theory was initially only used in economics, but it eventually paved its way into other academic fields, such as political science, in the 1970s and onwards.

With the ever-expanding field of use of game theory, the theory has been increasingly both praised and criticised as analytical tool. Some say its stringency helps clarifying and understanding the reality, while others says it leaves out essential elements of it, and therefore impede understanding. Some elements from the pro- and con-arguments follow in the two subsequent paragraphs.

2.2.2 Advantages of game theory

One of the advantages of using game theory as an analyzing tool is that it gives a clear recipe of what elements to look for in the situation: actors, their preferences, possible outcomes et cetera. This has a structuring function, helping the researcher to keep the relevant information from the irrelevant one (Hovi 2008:15).

The precise terminology in the field also eases communication between scientists, including communication between scientists in different fields. Scientific cooperation often flounders because of communication problems, where different terminology or the lack of precise notions creates apparent disagreement. One can avoid this by

speaking the same language. The formal reasoning of game theory also ensures logic consistency and eases the cumulativeness in science (ibid.).

In game theory, inconsistency between theory and reality is not explained ad hoc, for example as mistakes. The theory (the game) is instead seen as inappropriate to analyze the situation in question (Tsebelis 1990:40). The validity of game theoretical research is thus strong, as it allows more easily for empirical testing. Rational choice with its parsimony may not explain everything, but what it does explain it explains well (ibid.).

2.2.3 Critics of game theory

The critics of game theory are often those who criticise quantitative methods and positivistic research in general. Criticism is directed against the presumption that a given outcome is a result of utility-maximizing conduct by the actors in question. They argue that the reality is far more complex than what can be captured in a mathematical model. The main criticism against game theory is connected to the notion of rationality, and this is the subject of the next section.

2.3 Rationality

There are many different definitions and ways of using the term ‘rationality’. Here I will mainly present the rational choice, and thus game theoretical, way of looking at rationality. Schelling wrote in *The Strategy of Conflict* that rational behaviour is not just intelligent behaviour. Rational behaviour is based on calculation of advantages. The value system of the player, which affects this calculation, is both explicit and internally consistent (Schelling 1980:4). This first definition of rationality, or rational behaviour, should be specified. The traditional rational choice theory does so in stating three assumptions (Underdal 1984:64-65):

1. The first assumption is that an actor knows his goals in a precise, consistent and definite manner. This is often further spelled out through four requirements, which are those of inclusiveness, ordering, consistency and stability. **Inclusiveness** means that the actor is able to consider all his goals and all utility dimensions affected by his choice. **Ordering** means that all the player's goals are related in a certain order of either preference or indifference. **Consistency** implies two things. First, the actor cannot prefer A to B and at the same time prefer B to A. Second, if he prefers A to B and B to C, he will prefer A to C. **Stability** means that if the actor prefers A to B, he will still do so even if a third option, c is added.
2. The next assumption is that the actor has close to perfect information regarding what his relevant options are, and the scope of possible consequences of these different options.
3. The final assumption is that the actor, by his well-ordered preference structure (first assumption) and his perfect information (second assumption), is capable of calculating utility-maximizing operations. Other than knowing what is best for him, he also knows how best to get it.

This perfectly rational actor is of course an ideal that real decision makers differ from to a varying extent. Many theorists now operate with different modified notions of rationality – “imperfect” rationality (ibid). These contributions, which modify one or several of the assumptions above, will not be treated here, as I use the traditional game theoretical understanding of rationality in my analysis.

How well the rational actor assumption fits the player in question has to be analyzed concretely, and the game theory predictions or explanations will fit the case accordingly.

The game theoretical understanding of rationality does not mean that the players are selfish – they can put the value of others well-being into their utility-cost analysis. Neither does it mean that the calculation is based on immediate cost and benefit. Future consequences are also in the calculus of a rational actor. Finally, this idea of rationality does not mean that all players share the same value system, or that a players value system is morally sound. It assumes only that the actor will follow his own value system. A player thus needs to calculate the other players' strategies from their, perhaps diverging, value systems, and not his own (Dixit and Skeath: 27-28).

2.4 The components of a game

A game consists of 1) players, 2) a certain number of strategies for each player, 3) a set of possible outcomes, 4) a set of preferences or utility functions over these outcomes for each player and 5) a set of rules of the game (Hovi and Rasch 1993:37).

2.4.1 Players

A player is an actor with the ability to make decisions (ibid.). In the beginning, game theory only analyzed games of two players, but soon game theorists came up with ways to analyze interaction among numerous actors. The players were also initially only single persons, whereas now we are also analyzing games where the players are states or other non-individuals.

Is it realistic to look at states as rational, unitary actors? The principle of methodological individualism says that a social phenomenon in last resort has to be explained by actions and collaboration by individuals (Hovi 2008:22). The bureaucratic politics model in Allison's study does so when he analyzes the US's actions during the Cuban missile crisis. Here the actions are determined by bargaining between different individual actors in the government, who are positioned in a hierarchical way (Allison 1969:707). There is no initial unitary national interest. The

national interest is the outcome of bargains between different, individual interests. This approach seems closer to the reality, but this does not necessarily mean that it is a better way to analyse a case of national policy or action.

There are several reasons to stick to the assumption of the state as a unitary actor. One cannot rule out the possibility that the governments of states are actually capable of making decisions based on common premises (Midgaard 1998:2-3). There might to a large extent be unanimity about what constitutes a state's national interests, especially in grave situations such as the one I analyze in this thesis. It is actually also quite difficult to leave this presumption of unity aside. Both critics as well as proponents of game theory use expressions with states as subjects when describing international interaction, such as "Russia means... Georgia says..." (Hovi 2008:26).

Second, it is a wise scientific strategy to start with the easiest model and then complicate the analysis at a later stage, when this first model is understood. Then one will be better prepared to analyze the more complex model. This is a general methodological principle (Hovi 2008:24).

Other related reasons follow from the principle of "zero-fat-modelling", which says that one should use the simplest set of assumptions that allows the model to produce a certain result. If subnational processes are superfluous to explain international interaction, they should be left out from the model. The more peripheral to the analysis the country in question is, all the more reason to treat its subnational processes summarily or not at all. If, however, the country is in the centre of the study, it might be less appropriate to leave these out (Hovi 2008:25).

2.4.2 Strategies

A strategy is a complete plan of action for a player. This means that if the game is simultaneous (see section 2.5), the strategy is the same as his choice of action in that one move. If the game is sequential instead, which means that the player can adjust

his moves to the other player(s)'s choices of action, all his preferred responses to these possible actions constitute his strategy. It is "a plan for a succession of actions in response to evolving circumstances" (Dixit and Skeath 1999:25).

2.4.3 Outcomes

An outcome is a combination of strategies. If one multiplies the number of possible strategies of each player with each other and with possible, if any, combinations of moves from nature's side, one will get the number of possible outcomes of a game (Hovi and Rasch 1993:38).

2.4.4 Preferences/ payoffs

When a game is analyzed, the different possible outcomes will be ranged after the preferences of each player. It is a game theoretical convention to give the highest number to the outcome preferred by the player, and the lowest to the least preferred (Midgaard 1998:5). The number given to an outcome for a certain player is called that player's payoff for that outcome (Dixit and Skeath 1999:26).

The calculation of payoffs and their mathematical expression varies in degree of complexity, but since I will use a simple ordering in my analysis, there is no need to go into details here. Ordinal preferences (i.e. best to worst = 4 to 1) satisfy the requirement of completeness, as the player is able to tell of any pair of possible alternatives which one he prefers or whether he is indifferent. It also satisfies the requirement of transitivity, as the player will prefer option 3 to option 1 if he prefers option 3 to option 2 and option 2 to option 1 (Hovi and Rasch 1993:99-100).

An important point, sometimes neglected by critics of game theory, is that the payoffs of each player do not need to be selfishly calculated – the player might have taken other people's wishes and needs in consideration while calculating his payoffs. The payoffs contain everything the player cares about regarding the outcome (Dixit and Skeath 1999:26).

2.4.5 Rules of the game

The rules of the game are everything that helps define the game in question (Hovi and Rasch 1993:38). More concretely, they consist of the list of players, each player's available strategies, the payoffs of each player for all combinations of strategies pursued by all the players, and the assumption that each player is a rational maximizer. The players need all this information in order to create a situation that can be analyzed by game theory (Dixit and Skeath 1999:29).

2.5 Typology of games

It is common to distinguish between different types of games along several different dimensions. Here I will present five main dimensions that are helpful when defining a concrete game:

2.5.1 Two-person versus N-person games

The first step to define the concrete game is to find out how many actors are relevant to the game, and hence whether the game consists of two or more players (Hovi 2008:27-28). Naturally, the more players there are in the game, the more complex the game is to analyze.

2.5.2 Simultaneous versus sequential games

Next distinction relates to whether the moves of the players are simultaneous or sequential. If the game is simultaneous, the players cannot adjust their strategy to observed moves of the other players. In sequential games, they can do so in all but the first move. This means that they can reward or punish the other players, or make conditional strategies – depending on what moves the other players choose. Of course, in a sequential game one also has to consider the future reactions of other players to the move one intends to make (Hovi and Rasch 1993:39, Dixit and Skeath 1999:18).

2.5.3 One-shot versus iterated games

It is difficult to tell which type of game is the easier to explain of one-shot or iterated games. A one-shot game is as the name indicates played only once, while an iterated game is played repeatedly. In one-shot games, the players do not have to consider later interaction with the other players when deciding on their strategies. The actions they chose therefore tend to be more surprising and rough. Iterated or repeated games, on the other hand, have a domesticating effect on the players, because they can gain more in the end from a good reputation and cooperation than from playing hard (Dixit and Skeath 1999:20-21).

2.5.4 Cooperative versus non-cooperative games

The divide between cooperative or non-cooperative games relates to the implementation or enforcement of the actions, not to the outcome of the game. In the cooperative games, joint-action agreements are enforceable, while cooperation in non-cooperative games (!) is only feasible to the extent that this is in the individual interest of the different players. Nevertheless, especially in repeated games, the players might cooperate in non-cooperative games (ibid: 24). An important point regarding this dimension is that in a cooperative game, all threats and promises are considered credible. In a non-cooperative game, on the other hand, only threats and promises that are rational to carry out are considered to affect the outcome of the game (Hovi and Rasch 1993:39).

2.5.5 Games with complete versus incomplete information

A game with complete information means a game where each players strategies and preferences are known by everyone, and everyone knows this fact as well (Hovi 2008:31). A game with incomplete information lacks some of this access to information for the players.

2.5.6 Games with perfect versus imperfect information

If the player, when deciding on his next action, is aware of everything that has happened earlier in the game, it is a game with perfect information (ibid:40). A simultaneous game will be a game with imperfect information, because one cannot have this type of information when all the players move at the same time (Dixit and Skeath 1999:79).

2.6 The solution to a game

The solution to a game is found either through dominant strategies or through finding an equilibrium. This is because these strategies are the only rational way to behave (Hovi 2008:36). As game theory assumes that the players are rational actors, this is necessarily what they will choose to do. A dominant strategy means a strategy that is at least as good as any other possible strategy, no matter how the other player moves (ibid:39).

There are different types of equilibriums, but they all describe a situation where every player is using his best strategy given the strategies of the other players (Dixit and Skeath 1999:30). Schelling calls these two preferred strategies in a two-person game an 'equilibrium pair'. If there is only one equilibrium pair in a game, this is its solution. If there is none, the game is without solution. If there is more than one, the game is without solution again, unless one of the equilibrium pairs is preferred by both players (Schelling 1980:292, Hovi 2008:47-49). In sequential games, the type of equilibrium that brings the solution to the game is called 'rollback equilibrium'. To find each player's strategy leading to this equilibrium, the observer will use a technique called rollback or backwards induction (Dixit and Skeath 1990:73).

Backward induction is the process of reasoning backwards in time from the end of a game to the beginning in order to determine what choices are rational at each stage of

the game (Brams and Kilgour 1998). I shall use this technique in my first round of analysis, in chapter four.

2.7 ‘Nested games’

In his book “Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics” (1990) Tsebelis explain how behaviour that at first glance seems irrational, still can be rational. He does so by integrating the context of the game to the traditional game theoretic analysis. It is in other words still a contribution in the field of game theory; he just expands the scope of relevant payoffs to the players.

Tsebelis starts by asking the question why some actors make apparently suboptimal choices of strategy. He does not settle with the idea of mistakes, or other motivations than rational calculus, as explanations here. He sees these cases of apparently suboptimal choices rather as cases of disagreement between the political actor and the observer (Tsebelis 1990:5-7).

The argument of his book is that if the observer, fully informed about the game he is observing, thinks that an actor’s choice of action is suboptimal, this is necessarily not the case in reality. The reason why the observer finds the chosen action suboptimal is that he has an incomplete perspective. According to Tsebelis, a political actor is generally involved in more than one game at the time (ibid.). He calls the game where the apparently suboptimal choice of action has taken place ‘the principal arena’. The observer is only paying attention to this game, although the actor is involved in a network consisting of this and other games. The title of his book – “nested games” – refers to this.

Tsebelis distinguishes between two different types of ‘nested games’ leading to the situation where an observer misinterprets the actor’s choice of action as suboptimal. One is what he calls ‘institutional design’. Here the actor is also involved in a game

about the rules of the game in the principal arena. This way he can increase the number of options. He can then choose an option with a better result than that from the *seemingly* better option (ibid: 8-9).

The other type of ‘nested games’, and the one Tsebelis write more extensively about, is the one of games in multiple arenas. This is the part of his theory that I shall make use of in my analysis, and thus concentrate on here. In the situation of games in multiple arenas, the player is acting in several arenas simultaneously, and these games mutually influence each other. As the focus of the observer is on the game in the principal arena, he fails to see the impacts of the other relevant games on the main one and vice versa. The point is that the players’ payoffs are variable. They vary according to the context, which is the other arenas or games the players are nested into (ibid: 7-10).

This means two things. The observer is unaware of the fact that other games are influencing on the payoffs of the player he is studying, and how they do it. He also ignores that the same happens to the other players’ payoffs and how. The player is thus better informed when calculating his own and predicting his adversaries’ strategies than the observer. Tsebelis studies several examples of apparently irrational behaviour and explains them rationally by looking at the complex of nested games, not only the main game. I shall follow his way of extending traditional game theory in my second round of analysis, in chapter 5.

2.8 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the theoretical background to my analysis. I started out explaining what game theory is, how it saw light as a theoretical strand and what the pro- and contra-arguments are to using game theory as an analytic tool. I then proceeded by dissecting a game into its five main components – that is the players, strategies, alternative outcomes, preferences and the rules of the game. After

describing these components, I gave an overview of different dimensions by which one can categorize games. These were all dichotomies related to the number of players, the timing of the moves, the independence of the game, the level of commitment between the players and their access to information. In the second last section, I wrote about the solution to games. Finally, I explained Tsebelis's theory of 'nested games' to complete the theoretical background of my analysis, which follows in chapter 4 and 5.

3. Factual Background



Figure 1: Map of Georgia

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to establish a factual background to the conflict between Russia and Georgia. First, I shall describe the geopolitical situation in the area, and place the two countries within this broader context. Second, I shall give an overview of the Russian and of the Georgian foreign and security policy, where I focus on some of the most important issues to both countries. Third, I shall discuss the notion of “frozen conflicts” with emphasis on the one in South Ossetia.

3.2 The post-Soviet security complex

Barry Buzan defines a security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely, so that their national securities cannot be realistically considered apart from one another” (Buzan 1991:190). According to him and Ole Wæver, the post-Soviet area forms a Regional Security Complex (RSC)

around Russia since 1991. This security complex has been formed by the Russian empire's waves of growth and contraction and changing degrees of separateness or involvement with other regions, especially Europe (Buzan and Wæver 2003:397). The RSC is further divided into four different subregions: The Baltic states, the western group of states, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Regarding security issues, a state in one of these subregions will mainly be concerned with Russia and other countries within its subregion.

There are only two unifying aspects for these subregions, and thus characteristics of the RSC. The first is the relationship between Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The other is the fact that an attempt to stand up to Russia would have to be done by forging a coalition across the subregions (ibid.). Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova made such an attempt with the establishing of GUAM in 1997, with the support of the US. Uzbekistan joined the group for some years, changing the name to GUUAM. After they withdrew their membership, GUAM was formalized in 2006 as the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. It has generally been perceived as an alternative to the CIS, where Russia is seen as pulling all the strings (Civil Georgia 2006).

Although many features are common throughout the RSC, the subregions differ especially in relation to Russian policy. They thus should be treated separately. The subregion of the Caucasus consists of two parts, the North Caucasus and the South Caucasus. The North Caucasus is in the Russian Federation and includes Dagestan, Chechnya and many other units and ethnic groups. The South Caucasus is Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The connections between the two parts of the subregion are mostly through groups divided by the borders, e.g. the Ossetians living in South and North Ossetia, on both sides of the Caucasus divide (Buzan and Wæver: 414, 419).

South Caucasus is characterized by a complicated interplay between internal regional issues and the issue of alignments out of the region. Examples of the internal issues

are the territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Russian involvement in the Georgian conflicts and the support from Russia, Iran, Turkey or the US to either Armenia or Azerbaijan are examples of corresponding external alignments (ibid: 420).

There are four main dynamics defining the Caucasus subregion: The secessionists in Georgia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, micro-coalitions of small ethnic groups creating spillover between the Caucasus divide and energy and pipelines. In all these dynamics, there is a strong Russian component. As the Russian influence remains strong and CIS politics the primary arena, the subregion of the Caucasus will continue to be a part of the bigger post-Soviet RSC (ibid: 423).

3.3 Russian foreign and security policy

According to Alexander Duleba, the director of the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, there are three axioms in Russian Foreign and Security Policy. The three axioms explain why Russia is so disappointed with the US and Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. The first two can be changed; the third cannot (Duleba 2008).

The first axiom is that Russia wants a global nuclear partnership with the US. They see the two states as global guarantors. Russia is frustrated because it is not currently treated as an equal global actor, although it does not doubt that it is. The partnership was undermined when the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty after September 11 2001, to concentrate on national missile defence. The Russian goal is to re-establish this relationship (ibid.).

The second axiom is that Russia seeks an “insider status” in the European security structure. Russia wants to be part of making decisions about war and peace in Europe. After the war in Kosovo in 1999, President Bush promised President Putin in a

communiqué of November 7 2001 that they from now on would make joint decisions about European security (ibid.).

President Putin read this as a promise that there would be no new Kosovo in the sense of a third part applying force on the post-Soviet territory (ibid.). The invasion of Georgia happened without Russia seeking international support and without apologizing in the aftermath of this unilateral move. Even if the Kosovo operation conducted by the West in 1999 was more brutal than Russia's version in 2008, at least the West had tried to reach a multilateral agreement before the attacks started, and they set up a UN peacekeeping mission with Russia participating after the war (King 2008:8).

The war in Georgia revealed Russia's view on current international relations. Russia considers hard power to be the only thing that matters, and thinks that the existing international institutions are just means to promote the interests of the US and its major European allies (ibid.). To regain its influence on European security, President Medvedev proposed on June 5 2008 to start talks on a Pan-European security pact (Duleba 2008). This proposal has been suggested to have several hidden objectives, among these both to divide and to bind NATO, to undermine existing European security treaties and to claim a Russian Monroe doctrine for its near abroad (Van Herpen 2008:1).

The third axiom is Russia's privileged interests in the post-Soviet area. What Duleba refers to as the "Bielavezha trauma", after the place where the agreement to dissolve the Soviet Union was signed in 1991, has marked the Russian national security identity since the fall of the Soviet Union. The NATO and the EU expansions have also threatened this axiom. The axis of traditional Russian states is lost, and there is little the West can do to ease the frustration the Russian feel over this (Duleba 2008).

3.4 Georgian foreign and security policy

3.4.1 The security objectives of the Georgian “Foreign Policy Strategy”.

In its “National Security Concept”, the Georgian government outlines for the first time since Georgia’s independence in 1991 the national values and interests, security threats, risks and challenges and the main direction of Georgia's National Security Policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2008a). These directions are further specified in a “Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-2009” (ibid. 2008b). Both documents are full of rhetoric, but they leave little doubt about what are the main concerns of Georgia related to national security and international relations.

One of the main objectives in the foreign policy strategy is to turn Georgia into an “independent, secure and stable country”. The goals related to this are to restore territorial integrity, strengthen national security, enhance regional stability, and to deepen the European and Euro-Atlantic integration (ibid.). It also says that to obtain the main security objective, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will “concentrate on the issues of peaceful resolution of internal/frozen conflicts in Georgia and restoration of territorial integrity, as well as on forming an international environment favourable to our national interests” (ibid). It seems as if the main goals in Georgian foreign and security policy are to enhance the regional cooperation, to solve the frozen conflicts by reuniting Georgia and to integrate the country into the EU and most importantly into NATO. In the next section, I shall focus on the Georgian NATO aspirations. The problem of “frozen conflicts” will be examined under point 3.5. The regional cooperation is of less relevance to this thesis, and will be left out. I think anyway that it is of less importance to Georgia, given the emphasis on integration with the West.

3.4.2 Georgia’s long path towards NATO membership

In Georgia, a plebiscite held in 2007 showed that more than three fourth of the Georgian population was in favour of NATO membership (Welt 2008:6). President

Saakashvili, who has been eagerly working towards Georgian NATO-membership since he came to power, fronts this pro-Atlantic attitude. He has repeatedly said that the main goal of his foreign policy is to join NATO as soon as possible (Welt Online 2008). Cooperation between Georgia and NATO has developed since 1992 (NATO 2008a). Georgia expressed her wish to join the alliance in 2002, but it was after the Rose revolution in 2003 that the quest for integration speeded up.

In October 2004, Georgia obtained an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) as the first country since this cooperation frame was introduced at the Prague summit in November 2002. The IPAPs are developed on a two-year basis, and seek to concentrate and intensify the cooperation between NATO and the country in question and assist this country in its domestic reforms (NATO 2008b). The next step for Georgia was to get a Membership Action Plan (MAP). This intensifying of cooperation between the alliance and Georgia, and the aid Georgia would receive from this mechanism, would irrevocably confirm Georgia's path to membership.

The Bucharest summit in April 2008 was an important event, and the declaration here on Georgia and Ukraine eventually becoming members seems of high relevance to the war in August. Georgia was hoping for a MAP already at the summit, but this turned out to be premature. President Saakashvili said in a lecture in Oslo in November 2008 that Georgia had warned the alliance at that point in time that if they did not get a MAP, they might instead get a Russian invasion (Saakashvili 2008). While the US has been fiercely promoting Georgian membership inside the alliance, other countries are more sceptical, among these Germany and France (Mediafax 2008a). Many have evoked the fear of worsening the already tense relationship between NATO and Russia as the main reason to keep Georgia out of the alliance. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in a speech in March that countries involved in regional or internal conflicts cannot become members of NATO. She also made it clear that Germany does not want Georgia to become a member anytime soon. This speech came directly after a meeting with then President Putin (Socor 2008).

The 23rd paragraph of the summit declaration which stated that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO was seen as an important step, although the lack of a time frame leaves NATO with great freedom of action. It was also stated here that the possibility of giving Georgia a MAP would be discussed anew at the NATO meeting of foreign ministers in December 2008 (NATO 2008c).

3.5 The frozen conflict in South Ossetia

3.5.1 Frozen conflict

The so-called “frozen conflicts” are an interesting phenomenon. However, they have received relatively little attention until now, both in the media and of scholars. The Five-Days War over South Ossetia has brought the world’s attention to these potential hot spots. Although the one in South Ossetia is most in focus, the other of Europe’s frozen conflicts are now also receiving more attention. Frozen conflicts are wars that have been “settled not through peace deals but simply by freezing each other’s positions” (Peet 2008). Many scholars oppose the notion of ‘frozen conflicts’ because it gives the impression of conflicts where nothing moves. The reality is often that these areas are boiling with political movement (Coppieters et al. 2004).

In the post-Soviet area, there are four frozen conflicts. Besides the two in Georgia, there is one in Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) and one in Transnistria (Moldova). One important reason why they deserve more attention is that the frozen conflicts “have a nasty habit of turning hot” (ibid.). The hostilities in South Ossetia were not an exceptional event, rather a confirmation of the rule. It was the amplification and the wide-ranging results of Russia’s intervention that made this case stand out. It is highly probable that the war in South Ossetia and the subsequent Russian recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will have an effect on the two other

post-Soviet frozen conflicts under Russian influence (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2008).

Russia has generally supported the secessionist entities in the post-Soviet area, because it has been in their interest to keep the conflicts frozen. They have often used this situation to extend control over national governments. Russia's role towards the frozen conflicts in Georgia and Moldova has not been the same throughout the years. At times, there have been periods of rapprochements of the Russian leadership towards the two countries' governments. This can be explained by Russia's own domestic threats of secessionism. Particularly in the 1990's, Russia's support of the secessionist forces in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria was limited by fear of creating a precedence for Chechnya.

The Russian support was also restrained because Georgia joined the CIS in 1994. In Moldova's case, there was a rapprochement between the Moldavian government and Russia in 2001-2003, when the pro-Russian Communist party came to power. Russia found it more valuable to have a friendly Moldova than a friendly Transnistria and a hostile Moldova. This ended when Moldova at the very last moment rejected the "Kozak Memorandum", which would have solved the frozen conflict in Transnistria mainly on Russian terms (Popescu 2006:4). Lately, the two governments are again trying to reach an agreement over Transnistria. Shortly after the military adventure against Georgia, President Medvedev pledged that he would solve the conflict in Transnistria, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has revealed that the Kozak memorandum might reappear (Diplomat 2008).

3.5.2 South Ossetia

Although the conflict between Georgia and the separatists in South Ossetia is "frozen", it has been exploding more than once since its birth under the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Already in November 1989, South Ossetia declares its independence from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (Reuters 2008a). This is

after the Supreme Soviet of Georgia made Georgian the official language of South Ossetia in August of that year. The fighting lasts for three months and around a thousand people are killed. About 100 000 Ossetians flee, mainly to North Ossetia, and about 23 000 ethnic Georgians flee from South Ossetia to other parts of the country (Opdahl 2008:41-42).

A second round of armed conflict starts in December 1990. Meanwhile, Georgia is also ravaged by a short but brutal civil war that lasts until January 1992. The secessionist conflict in South Ossetia is settled by a tripartite armistice between Georgia, Russia and South Ossetia in July 1992. This armistice will last until August 2008. A peacekeeping force consisting of 500 soldiers from each of the three parts is also set up to watch over the armistice, after pressure from Russia. In 1993, South Ossetia drafts its own constitution, and their first president is elected in 1996. In late 2000, Georgia and Russia sign an intergovernmental agreement to re-establish the economy in South Ossetia (ibid, Reuters 2008a).

In 2001, Eduard Kokoity is elected as president of South Ossetia. The following year he asks the Kremlin to recognize the South Ossetian independence, and make South Ossetia a part of Russia. In January 2005, Russia gives guarded approval of a Georgian plan to make a compromise with South Ossetia. In this plan, South Ossetia is promised an extensive degree of autonomy. In return, South Ossetia is to renounce her demand for full independence. However, a referendum in South Ossetia in November 2006 shows that the population is overwhelmingly pro-secession. Georgia claims that this referendum is orchestrated from Moscow and claims it to be a Russian provocation to wage war (Reuters 2008a).

In April 2007, Georgia's parliament approves a law to create a temporary administration in South Ossetia, which provokes Russia. In June same year, South Ossetia accuses Georgia of attacking Tskhinvali with mortar and sniper fire, an accusation fiercely opposed by Georgia. The Organisation for Security and

Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initiates talks between the secessionists and Georgia, but these break down in October of that year (ibid.).

In March 2008, after the West's recognition of Kosovo's independence in February, South Ossetia and Abkhazia asks to be equally treated. Russia's parliament urges the Kremlin to fulfil this request because of Georgia's quest for NATO membership. In April, a Georgian deal on power sharing is rejected by South Ossetia, who will only settle for complete independence. In August, fighting between the separatists and Georgia recommence (ibid.) and Georgia launches the military attack on South Ossetia that results in the Five-Day War with Russia.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to place the Five-Day War between Georgia and Russia into its geopolitical context. I first looked at Buzan and Wæver's account for the security mechanisms in the post-Soviet Regional Security Complex (RSC) and the subregion of the Caucasus and its Southern and Northern constituents. What is most important is the unquestionably dominant position of Russia in the region and particularly Russia's role in sustaining the post-Soviet frozen conflicts. Although I used Buzan and Wæver's presentation of the RSC, I will not use their RSC theory in my analysis. Next, I looked at three axioms in Russian Foreign and Security policy. Threats to these axioms are seen as reasons why Russia has retaken a sceptical approach towards the West. Then I looked at the main objectives of Georgian Foreign and Security policy, with an emphasis on Georgia's NATO aspirations. Finally, I explained the concept of "frozen conflicts" and gave an overview of main events in the South Ossetian recent history. I have in other words given a factual background to my analysis, which starts in the next chapter.

4. Traditional game theoretical analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall first analyse the different aspects of the game of South Ossetia, and define what type of game it is. I shall then proceed by looking closer at the actors' different strategies, their preferences, the possible outcomes of and the solution to the game. Then I shall seek to answer my research question as to whether it was rational for Georgia to attack, given their preferences in the game of South Ossetia. Every game theoretical term used in this chapter has already been explained in the theoretical overview in chapter 2 and will not be repeated here.

4.2 The game of South Ossetia

4.2.1 Players

I choose to analyze this as a two-person game, where the actors are Russia and Georgia. I do not think that it is necessary to treat South Ossetia as a player in this game, even if the war was fought over their territory and the South Ossetians played their part in the outbreak and the continuation of the war. The justification for keeping them out of the analysis is primarily that they are not in a position to make decisions that change the game. As I see it, their decisions and actions in the drama affected neither the Georgian nor the Russian preference structure. That the Georgians referred to South Ossetian attacks on their citizens as a reason as to why they in return attacked, is not sufficient reason to admit South Ossetia as a player.

Another reason, even though I find the first one sufficient, is that it seems artificial to separate South Ossetia from Russia – they are on the same team. South Ossetians are pro-Moscow. In the Soviet Union, the Ossetians had an autonomous region within

Georgia. According to the Georgians, the Ossetians cooperated with the Bolsheviks and were more pro-Soviet. Today, they feel more connected to Russia than to Georgia, because their ethnic kin live in North Ossetia (Guardian 2008a). The majority of the South Ossetians have Russian citizenships (around 70 per cent according to Opdahl 2008:13). Moscow contributes directly, with Russian funds making up two thirds of the South Ossetian annual budget revenues of around 30 million dollars (Irish Times 2008). There is little the South Ossetian leadership can do without the approval of Moscow.

The question then becomes who the actors Russia and Georgia are. In chapter two, I have already dealt with the debate on whether states can be treated as unitary actors in general. I argue that in my game, the reasons to apply this perspective is even more apparent, and the reasons not to do it, even less so.

First, this game is about the core of national interests, namely security and defence. In matters like these, there is all reason to believe that the individuals that constitute the nation have common interests. The type of situation is characterised by high temperature and time pressure, which makes the leaders' opinion the relevant one when analyzing the measures taken, as probably no one else has had the possibility to interfere.

Second, both players in my game, Russia and Georgia, are authoritarian states. It is very probable that their leaders have been making the decisions in the game more or less by themselves. This means that there should not be great methodological problems related to looking for rationality in the Russian and the Georgian behaviour.

An important point is that I am searching for rationality in the decision of the leader of Georgia to attack South Ossetia. I will naturally study the national interests of Georgia when looking for rational reasons to why he decided to attack. However, what is rational for the leader to do, is not necessarily only based on the interests of

his country. I will look into also the more personal reasons that might have motivated the leader's decision. If the leader thought he, on the whole, would gain by attacking, the action is rational even if it was neither wise nor in the interest of the country.

This mixture of personal and state interests is not at odds with the theory of the state as a unitary actor. The theory does not imply that the state acts in its own interest, i.e. the national interest, rather than in the interest of its individual leaders. What the theory of the state as a unitary actor requires – when strictly interpreted – is that the calculations and decisions are based on only one “mind-set” (Underdal 1984:67). As long as the considerations based on both national interests and personal interests are made within the same mind set –i.e. that of the Georgian or of the Russian leadership, it makes sense to look for rationality using game theory.

Russia is by far the more powerful of the two players in the game of South Ossetia. The leadership in Russia consists of President Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and their political entourage in Kremlin. Medvedev took over the presidency in 2008. Putin then became Prime Minister, after eight successful years as president during which he restored Russia's image as a great power. President Medvedev was, at least in the beginning of his mandate, widely regarded as a marionette in Putin's hands. The political reasoning before and after the change from Putin to Medvedev seems to be similar.

Georgia has a minuscule role internationally and regionally compared to Russia. The focus will nonetheless be even stronger on this second player in the game, as my research question concerns this player's calculations and actions. The study of the Russian player is relevant to the degree it helps throwing light on the Georgian player's behaviour. In this sense, Georgia is the main player. The leader of Georgia is President Saakashvili, a man who is no softer than Putin, only with significantly less capabilities and power behind his will. Even though Georgia is widely regarded as a democratic country, President Saakashvili's regime is authoritarian. David

Kakabadze, the director of Radio Free Europe Georgian Service, characterizes the governing style of the president and his closest aides as “we know best, so don't interfere” (Kakabadze 2008). Other critics of the Georgian president have described him as both “a demagogue and a populist with a strong lust for power” (BBC 2004a).

As I have mentioned, a game between two countries with such authoritarian leaders as Medvedev/Putin and Saakashvili, is ideal in game theoretical analysis, since the individualist or elite-perspective can be justified as being close to reality.

4.2.2 Type of game

As regards the first dichotomy of game characteristics, this is a two-player game with Georgia and Russia as players. If I had included more actors, it would have been an N-player game, which is more complicated to analyze. Fortunately, the easiest way is in my opinion also the best way in this situation. The general methodological principle of starting with the simplest case, and proceeding stepwise in the direction of more complicated – allegedly more realistic – models, supports this view.

The next question is whether we are looking at a sequential or a simultaneous game. It is obvious that this game of South Ossetia is sequential, since the second player is making its move as a response to the first player's move. The order of the moves is known in advance. If Georgia does not make the first move, there will be no game at all, since Russia is satisfied with the status quo. Georgia's move is either to attack or not to attack. When Georgia decides what to do, it is Russia's time to respond to that choice by a move they find appropriate, to counterattack or not. Russia's strategies are therefore conditional.

The third distinction of games is between one-shot and iterated games. It is again easy to see into what category the game of South Ossetia falls. A war is rarely a repeated exercise, and everything about the situation tells us that we are dealing with an exceptional case – a one-shot game between Georgia and Russia. Of course, this does

not mean that the two states will not continue their disputes over South Ossetia and other matters. It just means that Georgia will not repeatedly (probably never again) attack South Ossetia to repeatedly meet the Russian answer of counterattack. If the players had chosen to negotiate the status of South Ossetia instead of going to war, it would be more natural to analyse that situation as an iterated game. A war is probably the best example of a one-shot game, characterised by roughness and lack of attention to later interaction with the other player.

The fourth dichotomy of games I described in the theoretical chapter was cooperative versus non-cooperative games. The fact that this is a one-shot game does not necessarily mean that it is a non-cooperative one as well. However, cooperative games are characterized by the faith in all threats and promises pronounced by the players. A war is not a situation where everything the parties say should be taken seriously. The game is often full of rhetoric and surprises. The game of South Ossetia was no exception, with distrust on both sides, and there was no reason for any of the players to trust his adversary. I can therefore safely conclude that it is a non-cooperative game.

When it comes to the first of the two dichotomies related to the information available to the players, the definition of my game becomes more difficult. I have to establish whether it is a game with complete or incomplete information. If the game of South Ossetia is a game with complete information, no Russian preference or strategy should be unknown to Georgia in the moment of choice of action, and vice versa.

The interests of the two states in the conflict of South Ossetia are quite opposite and more or less evident to anyone interested in the subject – which of course the two actors are. When it comes to the strategies, the picture becomes less clear. Of course, both players knew the available strategies of the other part, to attack or not attack. What I am not so certain of is whether Georgia knew what the Russian response to

their strategy of attacking would be, or not. Did they know what the outcome would be?

That Russia would counterattack if Georgia chose to attack seems quite evident. However, according to researcher Gaïdz Minassian, some sources say that President Saakashvili did not expect Russian retaliation at all, although he admits this point needs further investigation (L'Express 2008). I find this hard to believe, as the Russian interests necessitated a military response, and the Russian leadership had expressed their will to defend South Ossetians on many occasions.

Yuri Popov, the head of the Russian delegation to South Ossetia, warned about this two days before the Georgian attack. He made it clear that Russia would intervene if conflict erupted in South Ossetia (BBC 2008a). This could have been interpreted as empty rhetoric, but numerous signs suggested it should be taken seriously by the Georgian president. Russia also committed itself by saying it would defend the secessionist area. It would be to lose face if they left the Georgian move unanswered. Russia had just accomplished a large military exercise, the Caucasus Frontier 2008, among other places in North Ossetia (RIA Novosti 2008a). Moscow apparently had claimed that these troops were prepared to “come to the aid of the Russian peacekeepers” in South Ossetia (Spiegel Online 2008). On this background, it must at least have seemed highly probable that an attack would be met with a counterattack.

A last point I will make in support of the assumption that Georgia knew the Russian strategy of counterattacking, is President Saakashvili's own statements of Putin's reaction after Georgia solved the frozen conflict in Adjara in 2004. He says that when he phoned the Russian president to thank him for “accepting developments in Adjara with understanding,” president Putin had responded ‘Now remember, in Adjara we did not intervene, but you won't have any gifts from us in South Ossetia or Abkhazia’ (Civil Georgia 2008a).

Nevertheless, Georgia may have thought that they could regain control over the separatist area in a swift blitzkrieg. It would be more difficult for Russia to justify intervention in Georgia if the reintegration of South Ossetia was already a *fait accompli*.¹ This could then possibly explain why the attack came during the opening of the Olympics, when Putin was in China (USA Today 2008). If one looks at Russia's increasingly threatening behaviour in the area and their military capabilities. However, this seems a risky way to think.

I shall assume complete information. I shall do so because I consider the information available to the players about the adversary to be sufficiently clear and good, and for the sake of simplicity. I think it is reasonable to assume that Georgia knew that Russia would counterattack if they attacked South Ossetia. As long as I am aware of the uncertainty of this assumption, it seems suitable in this first part of the analysis.

The second distinction related to information is between games with perfect and imperfect information. There was no doubt about the Georgian attack in Russia when it happened, as the swift response also implies. Russia knew what had happened so far in the game when it was its turn to move, if not all the details.

4.2.3 The players' strategies

In the game of South Ossetia, the two players only make one move each. This means that their strategies only concern one choice of action each. Georgia moves first, and will choose a strategy keeping Russia's subsequent move in mind. Russia is player number two, and the Russian move will thus be a direct response to the Georgian one.

4.2.3.1 Georgia's strategies

When I look at the actions available to Georgia regarding the solution of the conflict in South Ossetia, I think it is reasonable to say that it ends up in the dichotomy of

¹ I am grateful to Helge Blakkisrud at NUPI for presenting this possibility to me.

either attacking to restore unity in the country, or not attacking and maintain the status quo. Georgia had already proposed negotiations, the last time was by President Saakashvili in his speech just hours before his attack on South Ossetia on August 7 2008 (Civil Georgia 2008b). This, however, did not lead to any resolution of the conflict. One could also say that attempts to negotiate in this case *are* a part of the status quo, as they are likely to end without any substantial changes.

They could also just give in and grant the South Ossetians full independence, but that would be highly unusual. States seldom give away parts of their territory. This would of course be a precedent to Abkhazia, and Georgian territory would thus diminish significantly.

4.2.3.2 Russia's strategies

As the game is sequential and Russia is player number two, it can make use of conditional strategies. This means that Russia can have alternative strategies corresponding to the possible strategies of Georgia. Russia will await Georgia's first move, and then choose the strategy they find appropriate as a response to that move. Russia's possible strategies are to counterattack Georgia to defend South Ossetia and to abstain from intervention in the conflict.

4.2.4 The outcomes

The possible outcomes of the game equal the possible combinations of the players' strategies. These possible combinations are as follows: 1) Georgia does not attack and Russia has no move to which to respond. 2) Georgia attacks and Russia does not counterattack. 3) Georgia attacks and Russia counterattacks. This means that we have three different possible outcomes of the game.

4.2.5 The consequences of the outcomes

4.2.5.1 *Consequences of outcome 1: Status quo*

If Georgia decides not to attack South Ossetia, Russia will not have an action to respond to. The outcome will be the status quo of a frozen conflict in South Ossetia. As I have previously stated, the term “frozen conflict” is not satisfying as the situation is not without any movement. The same criticism can be addressed to calling the outcome status quo, as it makes one think of a situation without changes. However, as long as I here specify what I mean by status quo – the continuation of the frozen conflict – the use of the term should not be problematic.

The status quo is very difficult for Georgia. Clashes between separatists and Georgians are sporadic but not rare. The separatists look at every day with status quo, with self-proclaimed independence, as a victory. The longer this situation remains, the harder it will be to reintegrate the territory with the rest of Georgia (Opdahl 2008:54-55). As long as South Ossetia is a no man’s land, the criminal activities will flourish in the area. South Ossetia is a paradise for criminals involved in drugs and arms trafficking and other crimes (Washington Post 2006).

To Russia, status quo is far less problematic. The situation of a secessionist entity where Russian military can be present and where the Russians have the unconditional support of the population, without having to take full responsibility for what happens in the area, seems favourable to the Russian authorities. The status quo of continuous frozen conflict also seems to favour Russia increasingly, as the secessionist areas become less connected to, and dependent of, the rest of Georgia. A concrete example is the distribution of Russian passports to the South Ossetians, which clearly swings the pendulum to the Russian side. Through this ‘passportisation’, Russia creates a legal basis for intervention in the secessionist entities, to protect its own citizens (Popescu 2006:9).

4.2.5.2 Consequences of outcome 2: Reintegration

If Georgia decides to attack South Ossetia to reunify the country, and Russia decides not to intervene in the conflict, the consequences will be reintegration of South Ossetia to Georgia.

To Georgia, this would certainly improve the situation in the country. If Georgia wants to develop into a stable democracy, it is crucial to resolve the two frozen conflicts on its territory, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is reasonable to assume that this would be good for the economy, i.e. since the amount of foreign investment probably would increase significantly. It would probably also put an end to most of the illegal activity now conducted at a large scale in the secessionist areas. The hostilities between South Ossetians and Georgians are either way so strong that costs of the attack in this regard will be of little relevance.

To Russia, reintegration is not a desired outcome. First of all, this will lower their influence in Georgia because Georgian authorities will regain full control over these areas, ruled from Moscow in the status quo. Secondly, it will reduce the Russian influence in the post-Soviet space in general, because it will be an important signal to the other countries in the area, with or without unresolved conflicts.

4.2.5.3 Consequences of outcome 3: War and status quo

The third and last possible outcome will, as outcome number one, have status quo as a consequence, but with an additional war between Russia and Georgia first. Georgia will here be severely hit, as Russia is a military giant compared to Georgia, and as the battle will be fought on Georgian territory. The status quo of deterioration in the frozen conflict will probably also accelerate, as a defeat will highlight the irrevocable rupture between South Ossetia and Georgia. For Russia, a war will have great costs, even if the battle is not on Russian territory. However, the benefits of keeping the status quo in South Ossetia will by all perimeters be even greater.

The game can be illustrated this way:

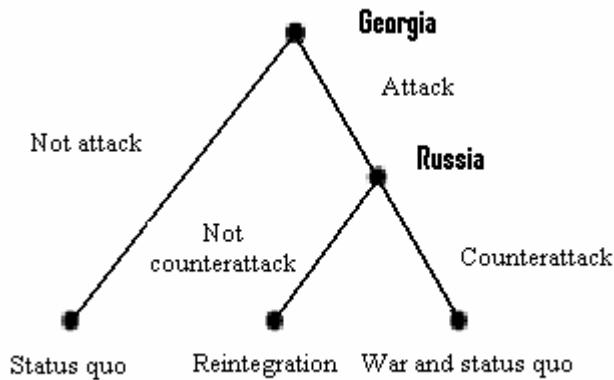


Figure 2: The game between Georgia and Russia

4.2.6 Preferences/payoffs

The next step in analyzing the game of South Ossetia is to range the three different outcomes after the preferences of Georgia and Russia respectively. The result is the players' preference structures. As I pointed out in the theoretical chapter, the highest number is always given to the best outcome and the lowest number to the worst. I also wrote that I shall use simple ordering of these payoffs, and they will therefore range from 3 (best) to 1 (worst).

I shall not consider the possibility of either of the players being indifferent when ranging the different outcomes – that is considering them equally good. I shall not include these scenarios because they are not very probable, and would complicate the analysis without making it better.

First, I will make a list of all the possible structures of preference of the two players, and then I will eliminate those I find not to be probable by rational reasoning. I will then end up with one preference structure for each player, which makes me capable of finding a solution to the game. I here name the outcomes by their consequences to simplify.

	1. Status quo	2. Reintegration	3. War and status quo
Georgia 1	3	2	1
Georgia 2	3	1	2
Georgia 3	2	3	1
Georgia 4	2	1	3
Georgia 5	1	3	2
Georgia 6	1	2	3
Russia 1	3	2	1
Russia 2	3	1	2
Russia 3	2	3	1
Russia 4	2	1	3
Russia 5	1	3	2
Russia 6	1	2	3

Figure 3: Possible preference structures

Now the elimination of possible preference structures can start. I think it is reasonable to assume that none of the players prefers the consequences of the third outcome, war and status quo, to the consequences of the first outcome, status quo. There is little to benefit from a war that does not change the situation. I therefore eliminate the preference structures Georgia 4, 5, 6 and Russia 4, 5, 6, which attributes a higher payoff to outcome number 3 than to outcome number 1.

Of the three remaining Georgian preference structures, the two first range status quo as better than reintegration. It is obvious that Georgian authorities want to solve the conflict in South Ossetia. In the choice between no solution and reintegration, they will clearly choose the latter. The only remaining preference structure of Georgia is then Georgia 3, where reintegration is ranged as better than status quo. This is Georgia's preference structure.

Of the three remaining Russian preference structures, only the two first range status quo higher than reintegration. It is certain that Russia prefers status quo to reintegration of South Ossetia into Georgia, for reasons stated under point 4.2.5. The

preference structure Russia 3 is thus eliminated, as it gives a higher payoff to reintegration than to status quo. Then, finally, the choice has been reduced to Russia 1 and Russia 2. The difference between these two is that Russia 1 gives higher payoff to reintegration than to war and status quo, while Russia 2 does the opposite. I have already assumed that Russia prefers status quo to reintegration. Does this still stand when the status quo requires a war?

I believe it does. Russia is getting militarily stronger and seeks to prove itself as a regional and international great power – if not a superpower like the US. It is also of great importance to Russia to keep and expand its influence and strategic position in its near abroad. Going to war to keep the frozen conflict of South Ossetia unresolved would also send a signal to other countries with secessionist areas not to try to solve their territorial disputes contrary to Russian interests. The costs of the war will probably be limited for Russia. The alternative Russia 1 is therefore eliminated, and only Russia 2 remains.

The two final preference structures for Georgia and Russia are Georgia 3 and Russia 2, respectively. I will now look at what the solution of the game will be, by finding the Georgian and Russian strategies that lead to an equilibrium based on these two preference structures.

Preference structure \ Outcomes	Outcomes		
	Status quo	Reintegration	War and status quo
Georgia 3	2	3	1
Russia 2	3	1	2

Figure 4: Preference structures and outcomes

To find the solution of this game, I will use the technique of rollback or backwards induction. I will first look at Russia's move, which is the last move of the game. I will then move from this last to the first move, which is Georgia's move. What is rational for Russia to do if Georgia decides to attack South Ossetia? Russia then has the

choice between obtaining a payoff of 2 by counterattacking, or a payoff of 1 by not counterattacking. As I assume that Russia is a rational utility-maximizing actor, Russia will choose to counterattack.

Then I turn to analyze the Georgian choice of strategy. Georgia, with complete information, knows that Russia is better off by choosing to counterattack if Georgia attacks South Ossetia. This will give them a payoff of 1, while they will obtain a payoff of 2 if they choose not to attack South Ossetia, and settle with the status quo. The rational choice for Georgia as a utility-maximizer will then be not to attack South Ossetia, and this will be the solution of the game – i.e. no game at all.

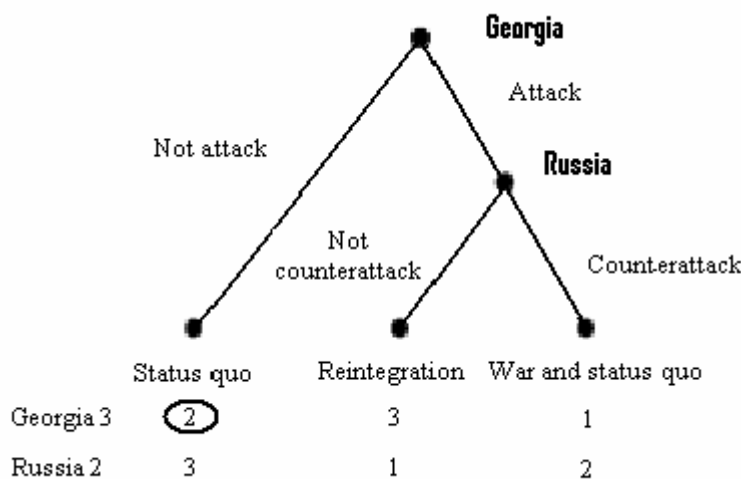


Figure 5: The game, with payoffs

4.2.7 The analysis' answer to my research question

As I now have established by using traditional game theory, the rational strategy for Georgia would be not to attack South Ossetia. As we know, their choice on August 7 2008 was the opposite. According to this first part of my analysis, Georgia's choice of attacking South Ossetia cannot be explained rationally.

I could now settle with this answer, and presume that the reasons behind the Georgian attack were of an irrational character. In that case, a study of President Saakashvili's

psyche could be the next step to find out why Georgia attacked South Ossetia. I could also conclude that the behaviour probably was rational, but that errors in my assumptions or my research program produced the wrong answers.

In the next chapter, however, I explore a third option. I see whether I can still explain rationally this seemingly irrational behaviour or not, by taking on a wider perspective. I shall include other games than the one of South Ossetia, and use Tsebelis's theory of "nested games" in a second round of analysis.

5. “Nested games” analysis

5.1 Introduction

Tsebelis’ theory of ‘nested games’ was explained in chapter two as an extension of traditional game theory, integrating contextual factors to the game being analyzed. The theory is aimed at explaining rationally a behaviour that was judged irrational after standard game theoretical analysis. In the first part of my analysis, I ended up with such a result. I found that the rational behaviour of Georgia would have been not to attack South Ossetia and settle with the status quo. What Georgia chose to do on August 7 2008 was, as we all know, the opposite. Georgia attacked its secessionist entity, with the result of a Russian counterattack. The outcome was war and status quo, the outcome with the lowest payoff for Georgia.

In this chapter, I shall make use of Tsebelis’s way of including contextual factors in the analysis of a game. I shall see if looking at other games in which Georgia and Russia are engaged will reveal factors that might influence the payoffs in the game of South Ossetia. In this way, I hope to shed new light on the Georgian behaviour and maybe find it rational in my second round of analysis. I call them new *games*, but strictly speaking they are rather *arenas*, where various games are played. This terminological inaccuracy does not affect the logic of my analysis.

I shall enrich the analysis with four new games, two for each player. In this thesis, I only seek to explain the Georgian behaviour. It might therefore seem less relevant to include the two new Russian games. However, as described in the theory chapter, the nested games influence on all the players’ payoffs. Even If Georgia is not playing in Russia’s two new games, these games will influence Russia’s payoffs in the primary game and thereby indirectly affect Georgia’s calculations here. If the new games affect Russia’s strategies in the primary game, they also affect Georgia’s strategies.

An important change from part one of the analysis is that I now loosen up on an essential assumption I made in chapter 4. I assumed the game to be one of complete information. There are arguments to justify this choice, and arguments against it. Therefore, it was important that I was clear about my choice and the possibility of a divergence between the model and reality. In chapter 5, however, this does no longer hold. The reason why I look at the new Russian games is that they might reveal Russian considerations of benefits or costs from the counterattack that alter the payoffs in the primary game. If I already have stated as a fact that President Saakashvili knows that a Georgian attack on South Ossetia will be answered by a Russian counterattack, this is of less interest.

By being flexible in my use of theory, more hypotheses might emerge concerning President Saakashvili's calculations. It is also more difficult to justify an assumption of full information when many different games are included in the analysis. As long as this change is made explicit, it should not interfere with the underlying logic of the thesis.

The four games I shall study are first the one between Georgia and the international community, second the one between Georgia and its domestic opinion, third the one between Russia and the international community and fourth the one between Russia and its domestic opinion.

	Georgia	Russia
<i>International community</i>	Game 1	Game 3
<i>Domestic opinion</i>	Game 2	Game 4

Figure 6: The four new games

I choose these four games because I consider them to be of greatest relevance to the players' calculations and subsequent choices in the main game.

5.2 Game 1: Georgia – International Community

In the international arena, it is particularly the US and NATO that might have had some motivational effect on Georgia's policy towards its secessionist areas, and therefore influenced directly or indirectly on the decision to attack South Ossetia.

The first point that seems appropriate to investigate in this arena is whether Georgia thought US and the rest of the international community would back them up against Russia in case of conflict. The second point is whether Georgia thought the attack on South Ossetia would speed up their integration with the West. If Georgia thought that the western countries would assist Georgia in the highly probable subsequent war with Russia, or that the country would get closer to the West by trying to solve the secessionist conflict by force, this might have influenced significantly the payoffs in the game of South Ossetia. A third and somewhat less important point is whether Georgia saw this moment in time as a window of opportunity to try to restore territorial integrity, before the international context changed.

5.2.1 Did Georgia expect support from the US and NATO?

It has been widely discussed whether the most important NATO member and geopolitical giant, the US, could be blamed for motivating Georgia to attack. Did the US give a green light for Georgia to attack South Ossetia? This aspect of the uncertainty about the outbreak of the Five-Day War deserves further study. Was the Georgian attack on South Ossetia a move tolerated, accepted or even initiated from Washington, as part of the great game between America and Russia? Were the signals from the US ambiguous, confusing President Saakashvili while he was calculating costs and benefits of his alternative moves? In any case, if Georgia believed that it

had the backing of the world's only superpower, the decision to attack becomes more understandable.

The US administration has stated that they consistently told President Saakashvili to refrain from military actions towards South Ossetia, and that the US would not back up Georgia in an eventual war with Russia. However, a senior administration official said that it was possible that Georgia "may have confused the cheerleading from Washington with something else" (New York Times 2008a). Apparently, internal differences in the Bush administration between hard- and soft-liners might also have sent unclear messages to Georgia. The "hawks" Dick Cheney and Daniel Fried wanted the US to increase its military support to Georgia while the "doves", among them Condoleezza Rice, did not. Rice managed to prevent the addition of Stinger missiles to the US provided military equipment and training assistance already taking place in Georgia (ibid).

By increasing its contribution of troops in Iraq, Georgia obtained more American military training that could be used in solving its domestic problems. President Saakashvili may also have expected US backing of the attack on South Ossetia because of the troops Georgia had sent to assist the Americans both in Afghanistan and in Iraq (Radyuhin 2008).

A military exercise named "Immediate Response 2008" conducted by Georgia and the US close to Tbilisi just before the war broke out (RIA Novosti 2008a) is an example of aid from the US that may have lead Georgia to think that they would get American support in case of war. Around 1000 American soldiers participated in this exercise (Hindu 2008). Even if it was justified by the need for American training of Georgian troops to Iraq, it was set up directly after Russia did a similar exercise in North Ossetia close to the Georgian border, the Caucasus 2008 (RIA Novosti 2008b). The military exercises on both sides seemed as the build-up to a war in Caucasus, and by

participating on Georgia's side, the US gave an impression of being the country's ally and protector.

Russia has clearly stated that they see these military exercises between the US and Georgia as both an inspiration to and a preparation for the subsequent Georgian move. The Deputy Chief of Staff of Russia's Armed Forces, General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, said that the invasion plan was actually "rehearsed and perfected during Georgian-American war games in Georgia" (Hindu 2008). The Russian envoy to the United Nations (UN), Vitaly Churkin, also said that "it is hard to imagine that Georgia could dare to launch its aggression against South Ossetia without a nod from abroad" and "We hate to think that the U.S. gave a green light for the assault"(ibid.).

The view of President Medvedev cannot be mistaken when it comes to assigning American responsibility: "The current tensions are the result of a less than wise policy carried out by the United States towards Georgia. They created a sense of being unrestricted and a sense of impunity for the Georgian leader. It seems he has received *carte blanche* to use any methods. To what it has led is now absolutely clear" (Civil Georgia 2008c). Former President Mikhail Gorbachev was less adamant, but also he thought that President Saakashvili "was expecting unconditional support from the West, and the West had given him reason to think he would have it" (Gorbachev 2008).

There has not been one consistent line in the American leadership's support to Georgia. In April 2008, Russia shot down an unmanned Georgian plane over Abkhazia, an episode often pointed out as the first step towards the war in August. According to a senior advisor to President Saakashvili, Cheney's office was clearly more openly critical towards Russia after this incident than was the State Department (New York Times 2008b).

The “dove” Rice has also been accused of sending out mixed messages herself. During a visit to Tbilisi in July, she, according to aides, told President Saakashvili in private not to respond militarily to Russian provocation and start a war Georgia could not possibly win. In public, she seemed far more supportive of Georgia. When President Saakashvili asked her in July whether the US intended “to give a tough fight” to promote Georgian NATO membership at the NATO meeting in Bucharest in December 2008, she even delivered the statement “Always, Mr. President. We always fight for our friends” (ibid.). One should however expect the Georgian president to lend more significance to the warnings he received personally than political speeches.

Georgia’s former ambassador to Russia, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, said in a hearing in November that Georgian officials perceived Rice’s visit to Tbilisi in July as an encouragement to attack South Ossetia. According to Kitsmarishvili, people close to President Saakashvili told him that Rice actually “gave the green light” (Washington Post 2008).

President Saakashvili denies this, stating that they “didn’t ask for a green light from anyone”. He also said that it was “an utter nonsense” that Washington had given any form of encouragement, and made a point of the insignificant figure of Kitsmarishvili to delegitimise the latter’s allegations. Rice, naturally, also denies the alleged unofficial encouragement (ibid.).

Senator John McCain is also very pro-Georgian, and spoke a lot about the conflict during the presidential campaign in the US. Apparently, McCain and President Saakashvili speak frequently (Washington Post 2008). This might have led the latter to believe he could expect more support from the US than what would actually be the case. The senator has used strong language to show his unconditional support of the “brave little nation”, as he called Georgia in a speech in the US. In August, he told President Saakashvili, that Georgia has the support of the American people in their struggle for “freedom and independence”. According to McCain himself, he also told

the Georgian president “that I know I speak for every American when I say to him today, we are all Georgians” (ibid.). This was after the Georgian attack, but the senator’s support for Georgia was not weaker before the war. McCain’s top foreign policy advisor, Randy Scheunemann has been a lobbyist to the US Congress on behalf of Saakashvili (Radyuhin 2008). It is not unreasonable to think that McCain’s Georgian inclination might have influenced on President Saakashvili’s ideas related to American support.

Some analysts think that the Bush administration actually triggered the whole conflict, using Georgia just as a means to facilitate a confrontation between Russia and the West. The alleged reason for this was to give Senator McCain an advance on Senator Barack Obama in the US presidential election campaign. Kremlin-connected Sergei Markov, who heads the Institute of Political Analysis in Moscow, says he has information revealing Vice-President Dick Cheney as the brain behind the Georgian attack on South Ossetia (ibid.).

However former Georgian defence minister from 2004 to 2006, Irakli Okruashvili, says that when they met with President Bush in May 2005, the American leader made it perfectly clear that Georgia should avoid military confrontation with Russia, as the US would not be able to help them militarily. He says that at the time he made the decision to attack, President Saakashvili thought that the US would prevent a Russian reaction using the diplomatic channels. When he realized that this would not happen, he redirected his troops towards the Roki tunnel to facilitate a swift Russian victory and thereby take on the role as a victim (Le Point 2008a).

There is not much doubt that there have been signals from the US that could be – and probably were – taken as encouragement to stand up to Russia. The uncertainty is related to the extent of American encouragement, and if they actually deliberately gave a green light for the attack on South Ossetia. It is likely that President Saakashvili expected stronger support from the US than he got. He obviously has to

deny this, because he cannot afford to criticize the West he seeks to join, and because this would be admitting his own defaults as a leader, and his lack of influence in geopolitical matters.

5.2.2 Did Georgia think that the attack would speed up the integration with the West?

As I wrote in chapter 3, the reluctance to grant Georgia membership in NATO has been quite strong, except in the US and among the newer member states. At the Bucharest summit in April 2008, Georgia did not obtain a MAP from the alliance, but NATO promised to review this question at the NATO meeting of foreign ministers in December the same year. If any of the countries in the alliance were to change their stand on whether to grant Georgia a MAP or not, this change could probably be connected to the war in August. If more countries now want Georgia in, I see this as a benefit to Georgia of their attack. If the opposite is the case, it is yet another reason why Georgia should have refrained from attacking.

For the purpose of this analysis, what is important is not whether such changes have indeed occurred, but whether President Saakashvili thought it probable that this would happen. However, it is not without value to look at the facts, as it is impossible for me to get access to the president's inner thoughts and calculations. I assume President Saakashvili to be well informed about the discussions in NATO and the different countries' attitudes, and he may have anticipated the NATO countries' reactions.

In August, after the Five-Day War, Chancellor Merkel held a speech in Tbilisi supporting Georgia and directing harsh criticism towards Russia. This was interpreted by many as a clear change in the German stance in the question of Georgian membership in NATO. Merkel assured President Saakashvili of Germany's support, and said that "Georgia will become a member of NATO if it wants to – and it does want to". This is one of the strongest statements in favour of Georgia's NATO

membership bid (Deutsche Welle 2008a). Interestingly, it came from the country leading the opposition against Georgian membership at the Bucharest summit.

Despite analysts judging this to be a sign of a fundamental change in the German attitude, Chancellor Merkel stated after a meeting with President Medvedev in October that Germany has not changed its position since the summit. She said it is too early to provide Georgia and Ukraine with MAPs, and that the meeting in December would only be “an initial evaluation on the road to MAP” (Civil Georgia 2008d).

Welt (2008) argues that NATO is reluctant to grant Georgia membership also because of the domestic situation in the country. The turmoil around the Saakashvili government in 2007, where the opposition was brutally oppressed, showed how fragile this new democracy was. The 2008 presidential election, in which President Saakashvili was re-elected, was described as relatively fair by international election observers (Nichol 2008:6). This may have improved Georgia’s democratic image somewhat, but the young Georgian democracy is far from flawless. However, international observers have been reserved about the democratic quality of the elections in May when speaking in private. They did not want to criticize the elections and thus create instability, when there was no real alternative to the Saakashvili government (Osservatorio Caucaso 2008). The state controls, directly or indirectly, all the TV channels in Georgia. Furthermore, the independence of the judicial and the legislative branch is poor (Kakabadze 2008).

The tense relationship between Georgia and Russia seems anyway to be the main obstacle to Georgian NATO membership. The frozen conflicts on Georgian territory have also been pointed out by others than Chancellor Merkel before the war in August, as a specific Georgian problem hindering membership. This problem is a part of the more general Russian-Georgian problematic relationship. Before the war broke out, many NATO countries feared that Georgia, if it became a candidate country,

would do its utmost to solve the conflicts to speed up the integration process (Welt 2008:2).

This may also have been the intention of President Saakashvili when attacking South Ossetia in August. Maybe he thought that swiftly resolving one of the two frozen conflicts would improve Georgia's chances of winning a Membership Action Plan at the NATO's December meeting (Trenin 2008b). If Georgia succeeded in solving its territorial conflicts, it would be more difficult to justify keeping the country out of NATO, especially after having emphasized these frozen conflicts as the main obstacle to Georgian membership.

It may also be that President Saakashvili thought that even if they did not succeed in South Ossetia, the attention of the West would inevitably be directed towards his country, and that this would lead to a positive development in any case. Maybe he thought that a war would create fear of Russian expansionism, as it would be a sign of Russia's increasing power and ruthlessness. Maybe he assumed that this would lead NATO to include the pro-Western countries bordering Russia, as a counter-balancing act.

In a hearing in Georgia, President Saakashvili said that the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity had been somewhat "complicated" due to the war, but that the war at the same time had eased the process because it demonstrated that Russia was an aggressor, not a peacekeeper. "Today everyone recognizes that Russians are occupiers and whatever inconvenient this truth might be for the world, that is the fact" the Georgian leader insisted (Civil Georgia 2008e). Seen in this light, provoking a war with Russia seems less irrational.

It is still not certain how the Georgian-Russian war influenced on the various countries' views. As mentioned above, the declaration of the NATO summit in Bucharest in April included a statement saying that the next step for Georgia and

Ukraine towards membership was to obtain a MAP, and that the decision on the two countries' MAP applications could be taken at minister level at the NATO meeting of Foreign Ministers in December (NATO 2008c). Some think that the hardening climate between Russia and Georgia may be bad for the Georgian integration with the West, in this case in NATO, others think the opposite.

Even if letting Georgia into the alliance would provoke Russia, there are other concerns that are relevant for NATO when deciding on this. The picture of a small and struggling young democracy left to itself against the Russian giant is not appealing to the West, especially when the country has turned to NATO for help, and this resulted in worse treatment from Russia. This has become more evident the more the situation between Russia and Georgia has deteriorated.

Another point is that NATO, or especially the US, loses face when Russia is harming their ally in the Caucasus. Georgia has been the third largest contributor to the war in Iraq, and is clearly the most pro-US and pro-western country in the area. When Russia humiliates Georgia, it indirectly also humiliates the US and the rest of the NATO countries.

The analyst Shalva Pichkhadze, among others, argued that then-President Putin did Georgia a favour in February 2007 at the Munich Security Conference by underlining the tensions between NATO and Russia, and accusing NATO of seriously provoking Russia by considering integrating countries in its near abroad. He thinks this will be interpreted as threatening signals opening the Europeans' eyes and this way will ease the way to membership for Georgia and Ukraine (Corso 2007).

It seems however, that the pendulum might swing the other way for Georgia this time. In the beginning of November, President Saakashvili asked NATO to present a timetable for Georgian membership. He said that if Georgia did not receive a MAP pointing out the reforms necessary to obtain membership, it "will send the wrong signal to the wrong people" (Deutsche Welle 2008b). The Georgian president had

good reasons to fear the outcome of the December NATO summit, as the negative aspects of Georgia's conduct in August increasingly has come to the fore. If the NATO countries view Georgia as responsible for the war, it would be strange to reward such behaviour with a MAP. The opposition to Georgian membership seems to have increased since the war (Reuters 2008b). NATO diplomats indeed predicted this during the war (Times Online 2008a). If President Saakashvili assumed that the attack on South Ossetia would lead to a war with Russia, he must have miscalculated the effects this would have on Georgia's chances to enter the alliance.

Before the war, the US worked hard on promoting Georgian membership in NATO. On November 26 2008, Rice said that it was "very clear" that Georgia and Ukraine were not ready for membership in NATO yet (Herald Tribune 2008a). This can be seen as if even US's support for Georgian membership is cooling.

However, Rice also spoke about an alternative to MAP as a route to membership for the two countries, apparently a British idea that was to be discussed at the summit in December. According to diplomats, Rice has also been in contact with her homologues in the other NATO countries, asking them to discard the MAP. This was interpreted as an effort to speed up the integration process of the two countries, and has provoked anger in "Old Europe". Rice thus probably wanted to calm the opposition here by her comments on Georgia not being ready for membership. However, she also insisted on the importance of staying true to the promise of an eventual membership given to Georgia and Ukraine in Bucharest (ibid).

The newer members of the alliance still want Georgia to join NATO. The Romanian president, Traian Băsescu, said in August that Romania did not change its view because of the war (Mediafax 2008b). This is likely to be the case among the Eastern European countries. These countries have experienced Russia's pressure in the recent past. Some, as the Baltic countries, fear that they might be the next to feel the new strength of Russia (Luchterhandt 2008). It is reasonable to assume that President

Saakashvili calculated that a Russian response to his attack would provoke fear and sympathy with Georgia in the West, and especially in Eastern Europe.

In the UK, Foreign Secretary David Miliband said on August 20 that it is an “important signal” to give to keep the promise of membership from the Bucharest summit. He also said Georgia’s formal membership process had begun – partly because of the Russian occupation – by the establishment of the NATO-Georgia commission the day before (Guardian 2008b). When President Bush was promoting Georgian membership at the Bucharest summit, the UK did not endorse him publicly. In August, the UK seemed to be supportive of giving a MAP to Georgia in December. What made them change their mind? According to a British official, “Everyone recognises that Russia has a part to play in the world but we have to make it plain that there will be consequences for what the Russians have been doing” (Times Online 2008a). In other words, the war may have influenced the British government to become more in favour of a Georgian membership process.

Labour’s deputy chief and key ally of the Prime Minister, Nick Brown, did not seem to share Miliband’s view. He commented in the Guardian that letting Georgia into NATO would be a mistake, and criticized the conservative David Cameron for pushing for this result. Brown asked a question many people have asked themselves after the Five-Day War: “Do we really mean to commit ourselves to an all-out war against the Russian Federation if something like this happens again? I don't favour that approach and I don't know anyone who does” (Brown 2008). Entering a war with Russia by attacking South Ossetia, President Saakashvili made the NATO members aware of the risks a Georgian membership will entail. This was not in Georgia’s interest.

5.2.3 Window of opportunity

It has been suggested that President Saakashvili actually decided to solve the conflict at this moment in time exactly because he feared that a window of opportunity was

about to close. Maybe he thought that when the republican Bush administration left office, his freedom of action would diminish. Talking about getting a MAP from NATO at the Bucharest summit, President Saakashvili said in March "If we don't get it now, the window of opportunity could be closing, for a number of reasons". One of these reasons was according to analyst Jackson Diehl president Bush with his "freedom agenda" leaving the White House (The Washington Post 2008). He might have reasoned the same way about support in case of war with Russia. Laure Delcour, a specialist on Caucasus, thinks that President Saakashvili saw it as a window of opportunity to attack during the Olympics, before his ally President Bush left office (Le Point 2008b).

5.3 Game 2: Georgia – Domestic arena

President Saakashvili probably made some reflections over his domestic popularity - and how an attempt to reintegrate the secessionist areas to Georgia would affect this - before he decided to launch the attack on South Ossetia on August 7. If he thought that attacking South Ossetia would benefit his position in the domestic arena, this may have had an impact on the preference formation of the Georgian president in the primary game of South Ossetia. The positive effects of the attack in this arena, would be a counterweight to some of the obvious costs of the predictable defeat in the main game.

The main issue for the leader of the country which motto is "Unity is strength" during elections has been the solution of the frozen conflicts on Georgian territory. He has built up a picture of himself as the strong, vigorous man who can reunite the separatist enclaves with the rest of the country. To avoid any doubt about his ambitions, he chose to visit the grave of the ancient King David "the Builder" during his inauguration in January 2004. King David (1089-1125) reunified Georgia in the beginning of the 12th century. Clearly, the new president set out to do the same (Osservatorio Caucaso 2008).

President Saakashvili has promised since 2004 to regain territorial control in all of Georgia, and he felt the time had come to make a move in this direction by attacking South Ossetia (Spiegel Online 2008). According to Okruashvili, the attack was not an impulsive move from a “hot-headed” President Saakashvili. From his exile in Paris, he reveals that attacks on both South Ossetia and Abkhazia had been planned by the Saakashvili administration since 2005 (Nouvel Observateur 2008a).

According to a survey from September/October 2008, President Saakashvili has 60 percent of the Georgian population behind him when he puts the goal of restoring territorial integrity at the top of his government’s agenda (International Republican Institute 2008). Additional 26 percent ranked this goal as second most important. The importance of this goal actually increased in importance after the war to the detriment of solving social problems/reducing unemployment and ensuring fairness. From February 2008 to September 2008, the percent putting “restoring territorial integrity” as the issue most important to them (of these three) went from 35 to 50 (ibid.).

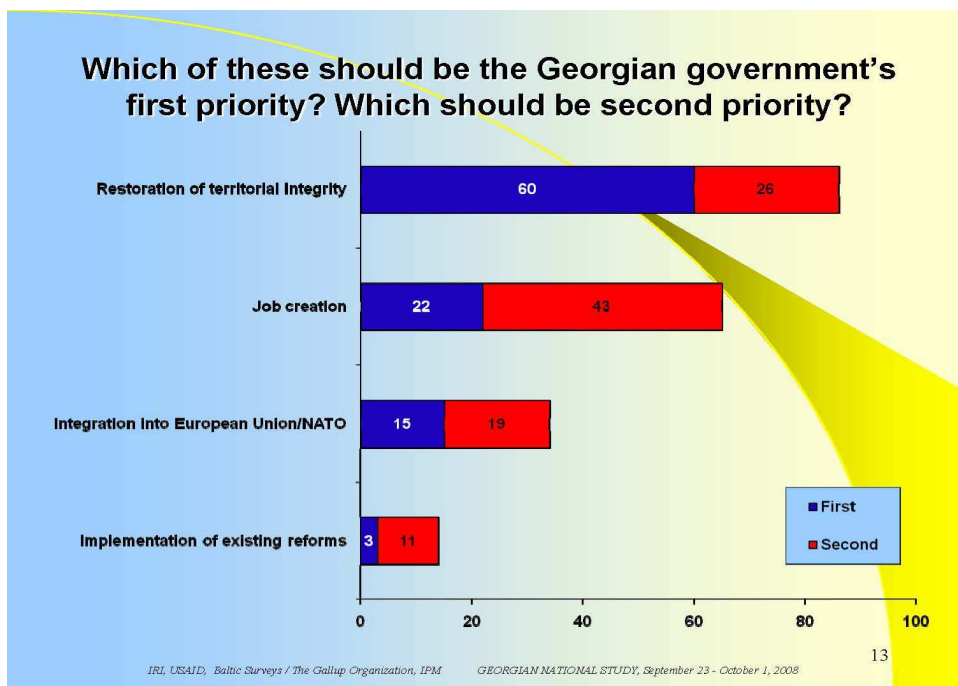


Figure 7: Georgian survey (IRI 2008)



Figure 8: Georgian survey (IRI 2008)

This is interesting, as the attempt to restore territorial integrity – the attack on South Ossetia – led to a war in which the civilian population suffered. Furthermore, the war did not lead to the intended result. I would have expected this to lower the popular support to President Saakashvili’s territorial re-conquest, but the survey’s numbers are saying the opposite: Only 19 percent were negative to the Saakashvili government’s performance during the war. This probably means that they do not agree with Okruashvili when he describes the attack as an immature decision taken without the necessary diplomatic backup and as militarily unrealistic (Nouvel Observateur 2008a). Only 13 percent agree with the opposition leaders wanting the president to resign. 91 percent answer no when asked whether they could ever accept independence for South Ossetia and/or Abkhazia.

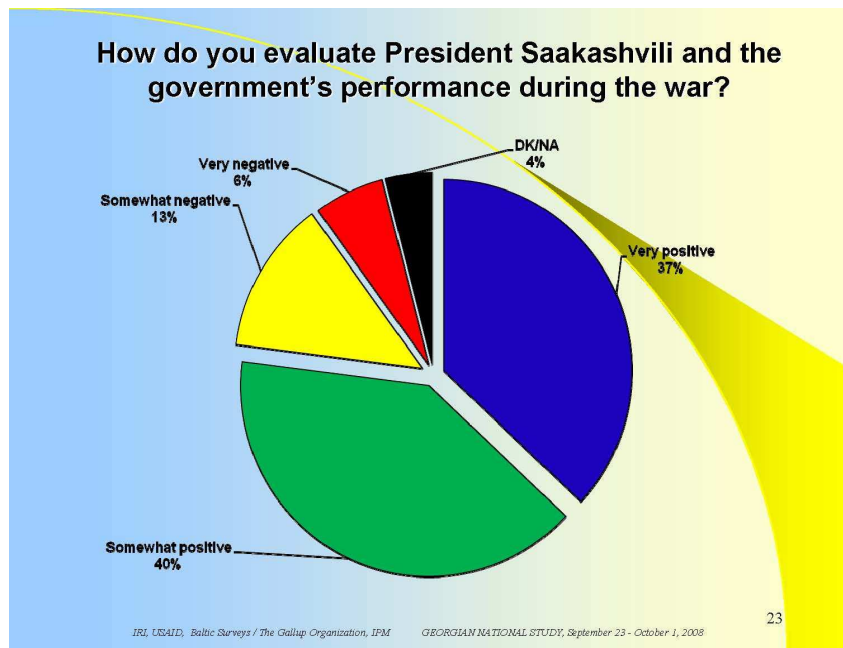


Figure 9: Georgian survey (IRI 2008)

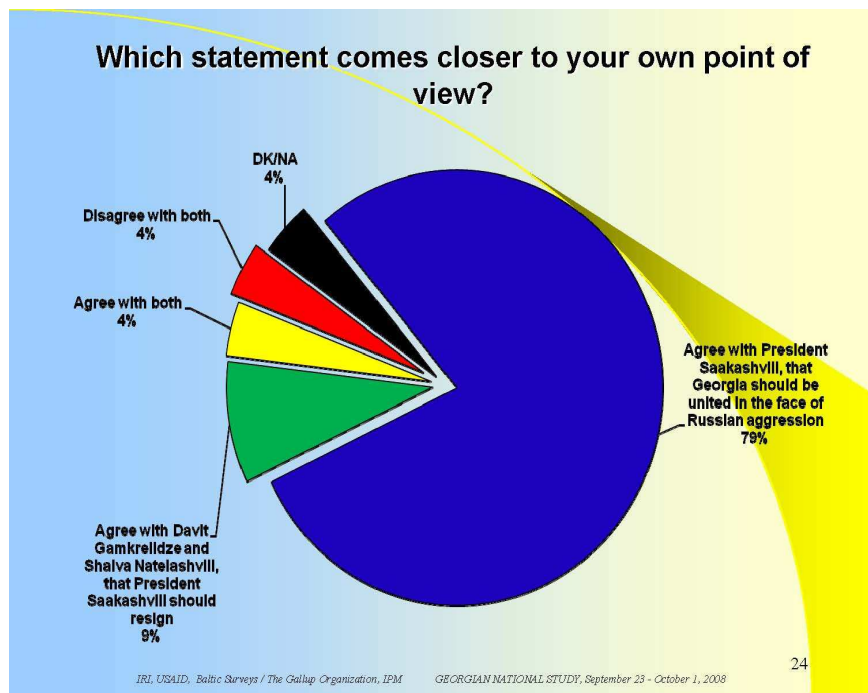
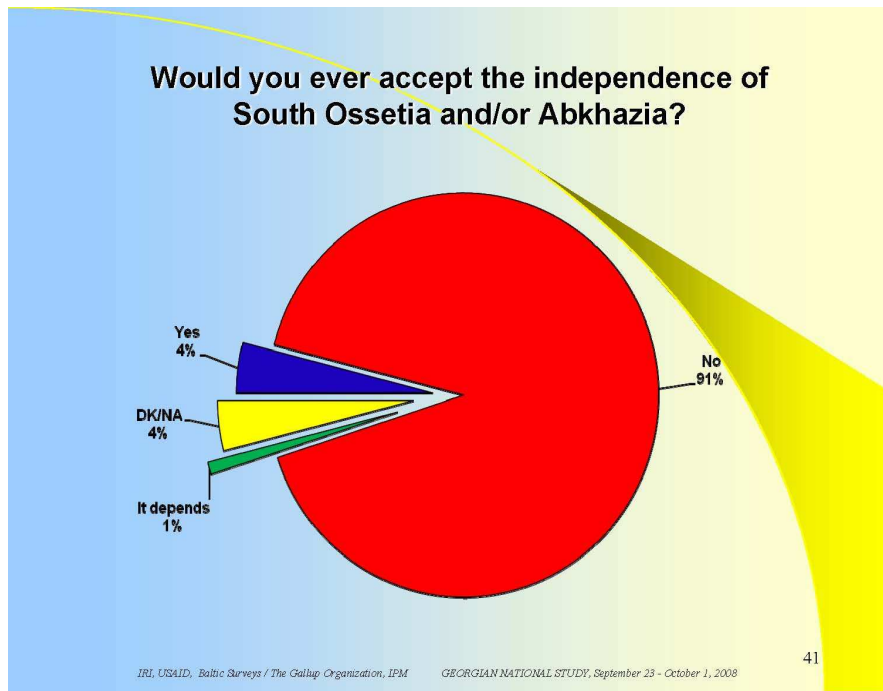


Figure 10: Georgian survey (IRI 2008)



Figur 11: Georgian survey (IRI 2008)

The actual results of the war are, as I have mentioned, not directly relevant to my research on President Saakashvili's motives before the attack, but I think they show a result with regard to the popular support the president was assuming he had at the moment of deciding to go to war. Knowing the political climate in Georgia and his people's aspirations, he must have felt certain of scoring points on the domestic arena when attacking South Ossetia, whatever the outcome.

It is likely that President Saakashvili's calculus in the main game of South Ossetia was influenced by the fact that there was no real opposition to him in Georgia. It is easier to wage war when no one seriously questions your actions publicly. Many analysts have argued that domestic pressure was motivating the Georgian president to attack. They think that the Georgian people were expecting results according to his promises of reunification of the country, and that this pushed President Saakashvili, acting to avoid losing his position. According to what BBC reported in 2004, the domestic pressure on President Saakashvili to solve the remaining frozen conflicts was already intense at that time (BBC 2004b).

However, Analyst Jonathan Wheatley, thinks that the Georgian leader felt extremely sure of his support in the Georgian population, because of his victory in the elections in May. The neutralization of the opposition due to the latter's internal divisions also eased his situation. According to Wheatley, the attack on South Ossetia therefore did not come about as a result of domestic opposition, but rather because of President Saakashvili's ability to surmount this and the boost of confidence this gave him (Osservatorio Caucaso 2008).

The analyst finds this to be a general trait of President Saakashvili: When he feels secure, he makes adventurous moves he would not dare to embark on under normal circumstances. The recapturing of Adjara in 2004 is according to Wheatley an illustrating example (*ibid.*). Many would have expected the Russians to intervene in favour of the secessionist leader, but they chose not to do so. It was clearly a risky move from the Georgian leader, although in this case it went well.

Four years later, President Saakashvili may have wanted to try to solve the conflict in South Ossetia first and, if successful, continue with the more problematic one in Abkhazia. The success he had in taking back Adjara in 2004 may have served as an encouragement in this respect. However, it was easier for Georgia to regain control over Adjara, since the aspect of ethnicity did not play a role as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The population of Adjara also turned against its secessionist leader (BBC 2004c). This means that President Saakashvili should know that it would be more difficult in South Ossetia and hence the victory of Adjara shall not have been a strong motivation to attack South Ossetia. Either way, government officials already at that time hinted on the solution in Adjara as being just the first step to resolve all the three frozen conflicts on Georgian territory (BBC 2004b).

President Saakashvili said after his first year of government that the success should not make him slow down the pace of reforming. He said other countries in Eastern Europe had seen the results of wasting time, and that a window of opportunity would

close if not used quickly (Institute for War and Peace Reporting 2004). He may here also have been thinking about the continuation of the reunification process after the success in Adjara.

Either way, whether it was from the fear of losing his domestic support as leader of the country, or from feeling secure of this support and hence capable of pulling through drastic national and international changes, President Saakashvili must have held it highly probable that the attack on South Ossetia would strengthen his position in the domestic arena. This again affects the preferences of the primary game of South Ossetia. It adds benefits to the strategy of attacking. This option thus becomes more interesting to Georgia in the game against Russia.

5.4 Game 3: Russia – International Community

As I wrote in the introduction of this chapter, I study the Russian games because they indirectly influence the preference formation of Georgia. If there are strong benefits or costs in other games Russia play related to a Russian strategy in the primary game, this will be taken into consideration not only by Russia, but also by Georgia, when playing the primary game.

The question relevant to my research question is: What strategy did *President Saakashvili* think that Russia would prefer? I assume that he would expect his adversary to be rational, and that Russia thus would be acting according to what served Russian interests best. In the analysis in chapter 4 of the primary game of South Ossetia, it is clear that a Georgian attack would lead to a Russian counterattack. In this second round of analysis, however, I loosen up on this assumption and the question is whether there are additional benefits or costs of this strategy to Russia in the relationship with the international community, especially the US and the EU. This may have had an impact on president Saakashvili's views on what strategy Russia would choose.

What would the consequences for Russia be of invading Georgia after the latter attacked South Ossetia vis-à-vis the international community? If a Russian counterattack turns out to have high costs on these new arenas, President Saakashvili may have thought (wrongly, as it turned out) that these were strong enough to alter Russia's payoff hierarchy. He may have considered these additional costs to be reasons for Russia to refrain from counterattacking. In such a light, the Georgian attack would seem less irrational.

When loosening up the assumption of full information, it is possible to analyze the case without assuming that President Saakashvili knew that an attack would be met by a counterattack. Batu Kutelia, the deputy defence minister of Georgia, indeed says that Georgia did not expect such a response from Russia (Financial Times 2008). This may nevertheless be rhetoric to fit with Georgia's role as a victim. However, it is partly backed up by some analyses of the attack. Defence Editor in Times Online, Michael Evans, writes that the Georgian military adventure showed signs "of rushed planning and a fingers-crossed strategy, launched in the hope and expectation that the Russians would not react, but that if they did, the Americans and Georgia's other NATO friends would come to his aid in one form or another" (Times Online 2008b).

Even if President Saakashvili considered a counterattack to be Russia's conditional strategy, he may have thought that this eventual invasion of Georgia would harm Russia in a way that would at the end strengthen Georgia's position towards its immense neighbour. If so, his decision to attack also becomes more intelligible.

There have been tensions between the West and Russia for a long time. The West's recognition of Kosovo in February 2008, the agreement between the US and Poland to install a missile shield in Poland and the decision taken at the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008 of granting Georgia and Ukraine membership at some point in the future, were serious provocations to Russia. Then-President Putin had warned that

Kosovo's independence from Serbia could not be granted without Abkhazia and South Ossetia having the right to part from Georgia (Spiegel Online 2008). According to an Administration official, he also warned President Bush when the latter visited him at Sochi, saying that it would be to cross Russia's "red lines" to promote Georgian and Ukrainian NATO membership (New York Times 2008b).

Then-president Putin also said at the Bucharest summit that "the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders will be taken by Russia as a direct threat to the security of our country" (Herald Tribune 2008b). Alexander Grushko, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, said immediately after the NATO declaration that it would have "the gravest consequences for overall European security" (Spiegel Online 2008). After this, a Russian reaction had to come; it was only a question of how and when. It does not seem like the West realized to what extent they had disturbed the Russian bear.

In this light, the Georgian attack was the perfect opportunity for Russia to reconfirm its dominance of its near abroad, and to send a message to the West showing what happens when Russia's opinion is not taken into due consideration. All these disappointments over the West are likely to have motivated the Russians to invade Georgia, to mirror the 1999 Kosovo war (Duleba 2008). When President Saakashvili decided to attack South Ossetia, one could expect him to include in his calculations the fact that he was bringing Russia this opportunity of revenge on a silver plate.

In 1990, during a private meeting, the US Secretary of State James A. Baker promised then General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, not to expand into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Working to keep Germany in NATO after the reunification of the country, Baker was willing to make this assuring compromise to the Soviet Union. He chose his words with care and accuracy, saying that "there would be no extension of NATO's current jurisdiction eastward" (New York Times 1997). When President Gorbachev later said "Any extension of the zone of NATO is

unacceptable”, Baker replied “I agree” (Kober 2008:2). The eastward expansions of the NATO were violations of this US promise, and a Russian response to this has been expected for a long time.

The US now fears that the new, strong , and not so friendly Russia will start using its influence, money, energy resources, its veto in the UN Security Council and its arms industry to undermine US’ interests worldwide (New York Times 2008b). In other words, the US is afraid that Russia is trying to change the international order, and more importantly, that they have the capacity to succeed. “The potential is big because at the end of the day, they are the hegemon in that region and we are not and that’s a fact” says US professor and specialist at Stanford, Michael McFaul. His colleague at Georgetown, Dr. Angela Stent, agrees. She says that “ironically, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there’s always been the concern about Russia becoming a spoiler, and now we could see the realization of that” (ibid.).

Many analysts have, as Masha Lipman at the Carnegie Moscow Center, pointed to the fact that the US needs a lot more from Russia than the other way round. This might mean that Russia has the upper hand. Important examples she mentions are the work to secure the old Soviet nuclear arms, support for the US warfare in Afghanistan and making Iran and North Korea give up nuclear programs (ibid.). Another point to add to that list is Russia’s energy resources, as Russia is an extremely important energy supplier to Europe. According to analyst Adar Primor, “it is doubtful the Georgian president can count on a lot of support” from the US and Europe because of these interests (Primor 2008). The Georgian apparent intentions of internationalizing the conflict, has then failed.

According to Sergei Markedonov, an expert on Caucasus issues with the Moscow-based Institute of Political and Military Analysis, Georgia has for a long time presented the frozen conflicts not as domestic conflicts between Abkhazia/South Ossetia and Georgia, but as conflicts between Russia and Georgia. He says Georgia

wanted to make it a conflict between the West and Russia, with Georgia as a natural part of the West. He warned Russian colleagues against getting drawn into an unknown game with unpredictable results, as “there’s a definite foundation for pragmatic dialogue, even bargaining, with representatives of Old Europe. They’re far from delighted with Georgia’s behaviour” (Eurasia Insight 2008).

Even if Russia expected that a counterattack on Georgia would provoke the West and create a sentiment of distrust not only with regard to the Russian government, but also with regard to conditions for cooperation and foreign investments in Russia in general, they probably calculated that these negative consequences would be outweighed by the positive ones. They may also have expected these problems with the West to be only temporarily. The ambiguous messages from the US, described under Game 1, where i.a. Secretary of State Rice was far more supportive in public than in private of Georgia’s integration aspirations could be a sign for the Russians to interpret the situation this way.

Actually, the sanctions by the West against Russia did not last long. Both the EU and NATO soon renewed their relations with Russia, after having cut off formal ties after the invasion of Georgia. This shows Russia’s new power, especially since the West initially said that “business as usual” was off until Russia withdrew both their troops and their recognition of the secessionist areas. They soon had to change this stance because, as The NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer put it in December 2008, “Russia is such an important factor in geopolitical terms that there is no alternative for NATO than to engage Russia” (New York Times 2008c).

Although not seeking to ruin the relations with the West, Russia has taken on a confrontational approach. President Medvedev showed this on August 26, saying: “We are not afraid of anything, including the prospect of a Cold War”. He said he did not want a return to the Cold War, but also that “everything depends on the position of our partners” (Times Online 2008c). After this, Russia’s demand for respect and

that Russian interests and views be taken into consideration has been stated clearly and unmistakingly. To Russia, respect – or even fear – may be more valuable than eased, but subdued, relations with the West. It also serves as a reminder to the CIS-countries of Russia's dominance in its near abroad.

In the game between Russia and the international community, Russia received certain benefits from counterattacking, and they probably counted on this when deciding on their move. President Saakashvili may have miscalculated regarding the relationship between Russia and the West, and of what “Mr Putin was prepared to do to maintain his image as the tough guy in the region and on the world stage” (Times Online 2008b). He may have thought that Russia would calculate with heavy costs related to a counterattack on this arena. This is all the more true if he thought the West would come to Georgia's assistance.

5.5 Game 4: Russia – Domestic arena

The last game I choose to include in this analysis is the internal game between the leadership in the Kremlin and the Russian population. President Saakashvili must have considered eventual domestic effects in Russia of a Russian answer to the Georgian attack while calculating the costs and benefits of this military adventure. If a counterattack was likely to strengthen or weaken the Russian leadership domestically, this would influence the preference formation of the Russian leadership, and hence indirectly the preference formation of the Georgian leadership.

In the Russian population, the support for the Russian diaspora in the Post-Soviet space is strong. Although the ethnic Russians in South Ossetia number no more than around 2000 out of a total population of around 80 000, the Russian ‘passportisation’ has nationalized most of the inhabitants into Russians (RIA Novosti 2008b).

A survey published in Moscow on August 20 2008 shows that the Russian military intervention in Georgia increased President Medvedev's popularity from 65 percent in July to 72 percent in August. For Prime Minister Putin the correspondent percentages were 80 and 83 (Nouvel Observateur 2008b). Another survey from the independent institute FOM conducted on August 10 and 11 2008 shows that 78 percent of the Russians approved the Russian military response, while 13 percent disapproved (ibid.).

This proof of massive support for the counterattack in the Russian population proves neither that the Russian leadership was counting on such a support, nor that the Georgian leadership did so at the time it decided to attack South Ossetia. It is still reasonable to argue that they were in fact predicting it, considering the strong nationalist tendency in the Russian population and its well-known support of co-national minorities abroad. It is therefore also reasonable to expect the benefits of the counterattack to the Russian government on the domestic arena to be strengthening the probability of Russian payoffs of war and status quo in the principal game of South Ossetia. President Saakashvili is also likely to have known this, and had therefore even more reason to expect a counterattack, which in turn gave him all the more reason to refrain from the strategy of attacking South Ossetia.

Another related aspect on this arena is that the war has helped strengthen the image of the new President Medvedev, not only his popularity. Putin's successor was at least in the beginning generally regarded as weak. During the August war, he showed the world that he had his own role to play in the Russian Putin-Medvedev power-tandem. The war also offered an opportunity to show that the allegations of tensions between the president and the prime minister were wrong (Radyuhin 2008). This is important to Russia because it shows that the country is well functioning and that the formal top leader is also a real decision-maker. The Kremlin now has obtained the image of a powerful player, both on the international arena and the domestic arena, with two

charismatic and strong leaders working successfully together to promote the Russian national interests.

A last important point is the fact that Russia has lately been less challenged domestically than in the past. The Russian leadership has made an impression of Russia “being under siege from Islamic terrorists and Western-inspired ‘orange’ revolutionaries” (Popescu 2006:6) to make the Russian population rally around its leadership. As Medvedev put it in April 2005: “if we cannot consolidate the elites, Russia will disappear as a state” (ibid.). This consolidation of the elites has been to the detriment of democratic pluralism in Russia. As I stated in relation to the Georgian leadership in Game 2, an authoritarian leadership will be less compromising in its foreign policy when it is not challenged domestically (ibid:5).

Taking into consideration the importance of the fate of the Russian diaspora to the Russian population and the confidence of the Russian leadership of domestic support in general, President Saakashvili should be aware of the Russian leadership’s most certain expectations of huge benefits in the domestic arena from counterattacking.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have extended my analysis to include four new games. I wanted to continue my quest for rationality by using Tsebelis’s theory of “nested games”. I looked at games that the two actors were playing at the domestic and at the international arena. I analyzed whether the benefits and costs in these new games related to the Georgian and the Russian strategies in the primary game, may have affected the payoffs of the two players in the primary game, or not. The seemingly irrational decision by Georgia in the primary game could maybe be explained rationally in the light of these new games.

6. Conclusion

I started this study of the outbreak of the Five-Day War between Georgia and Russia by asking the research questions “*Was the Georgian attack on South Ossetia an irrational act? If not, what rational reasons were behind it?*” After presenting a factual and a theoretical background to my subject, I embarked on a two-folded analysis to answer these questions.

In chapter 4, I made a first effort to answer the research question using traditional game theory. After looking at the players’ interests, strategies and payoffs, and how the game rationally would play out, I came to the conclusion that Georgia, if it was a rational actor, would have chosen the other strategy available – namely not to attack. The answer to my first research question based on this analysis would then have to be “yes”. The Georgian attack on South Ossetia was an irrational act. The second research question then becomes superfluous.

In chapter 5, however, I decided to apply another theory to my case, as a second effort to detect rationality in Georgia’s move. This theory is more of a supplement and an extension of traditional game theory, than an alternative to it. Tsebelis’s theory of “nested games” is used to explain rationally acts that are initially seen as irrational. It seemed perfect to apply to my case, as the Georgian attack was found irrational after traditional game theory. What Tsebelis does, is to include the context of the primary game, i.e. other games, because he thinks a game should not be analyzed separately from the other games the actors are playing. I chose to include four new games, to bring the domestic and international arenas of the two players into the analysis.

I did not pay too much attention to methodological stringency in this choice, as my use of Tsebelis’s theory was of a structuring kind. It repeat that I am aware that the four new *games* I introduce are rather *arenas where other games are played*. As I said in the introduction to chapter 5, this inaccuracy does not affect the logic behind the

analysis. I think the thesis would lose in clarity if I had tried to divide these arenas into different games. The arguments presented would be the same.

I find that Game 1 between Georgia and the international community may have strengthened the payoff of the strategy of attacking to Georgia. It is probable that President Saakashvili thought he would get the support of the West, and even that this might be worth a war in the long term. It is even possible that he thought that the US and NATO would come to Georgia's rescue militarily.

In Game 2 between Georgia and the domestic opinion, I also find reasons that may have pushed the Georgian president to attack. He had risen to power on his promise to reunite Georgia, he had managed to retake Adjara and he may have felt that it was time to move to maintain his popular support as a strong leader.

Because of Game 3 between Russia and the international community, it is possible that President Saakashvili thought that Russia would not take the risk of counterattacking, due to the costs in the form of negative sanctions from the international community this would entail. This would particularly be the case if Russia thought that the US and NATO might intervene in the conflict. However, I argued that Russia probably did not expect the costs of a counterattack on this arena to be sufficiently high to refrain from choosing this strategy.

In Game 4 between Russia and the domestic opinion, I find that the benefits for the Russian government of the Russian counterattack are great, especially because of the Russian population's support of the Russians abroad. The costs for the Russian leadership of not answering militarily on Georgia's attack on South Ossetia would have taken a severe toll on its popularity.

My conclusion from this round of analysis is that if President Saakashvili thought that Russia would not counterattack despite all the reasons they had to do so, or if he

thought that the US and NATO would intervene on Georgia's side and hence change the consequences of outcome 3 (Georgian attack and Russian counterattack = war and status quo), his decision was rational after all. It turned out not to be wise, but that is not relevant here. If he did a miscalculation on the probability of a Russian counterattack or on US/NATO assistance, this does not make his move irrational.

The decision was rational as long as he pursued what was in his perceived interests. However, I am not convinced that he did so. Having analyzed the situation, I find it hard to believe that President Saakashvili thought it would be possible to avoid a Russian counterattack. Nor am I convinced that he fully counted on assistance from the West. If he did not, he should have chosen not to attack to maximize his payoffs, unless the quest for domestic support and the willingness to carry through a widespread domestic wish to restore territorial integrity, i.e. to go to war, in spite of the costs, tipped the balance.

The answer to my yes/no research question whether the Georgian decision to attack was irrational is "maybe". The answer to the second research question of what rational reasons, if any, were behind the attack is then tentative, and my hypotheses are:

1) He did not exclude the possibility of a Russian counterattack not taking place. 2) He expected more assistance from the West if it came to war than he got, and hence other final consequences of the outcome. 3) He foresaw that in the event of war, the international image of Russia as a peaceful neighbour would tarnish, and that the West would possibly take a tougher stance against Russia. This would probably again, in his eyes, increase the possibility of closer ties between Georgia and the West. 4) Last, but not least, the attack on South Ossetia would fulfil what he felt as a national obligation to try to restore territorial integrity, and thus maintain or increase his support in the Georgian population.

Even if my thesis does not detect with certainty the rationality behind Georgia's decision to attack South Ossetia, I do not automatically subscribe to the statement of President Medvedev that "Georgia's leadership had basically gone crazy" (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2008). My thesis does not confirm any irrationality, either. As I said in the introduction, I wanted to look into a sample of different issues, and make some hypotheses about their relevance to the ultimate Georgian decision to attack. It is not decisive if I cannot conclude the one or the other way.

The real purpose of this thesis is to underscore the importance of looking at different arenas when discussing the rationality of an act. Many arguments have appeared during this work that at least make the Georgian president's decision a bit more understandable than at first sight.

It would be interesting to continue the work of producing hypotheses, or to look further into the ones I have presented here. There are other investigations being conducted over the subject, notably the EU investigation on the motives behind the Five-Day War. It is led by the Swiss Heidi Tagliavini, who was the UN Special Representative in Georgia from 2002 to 2006 (Le Monde 2008). In the wake of this investigation, new reasons for the attack might come to the fore.

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